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(Re)creating Social Life Out of Social Death: cross-cultural alliances in the circum-Atlantic, 1760-1815

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(Re)creating Social Life Out of Social Death:
Cross-Cultural Alliances in the Circum-Atlantic, 1760-1815

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Jeffrey Charles Gagnon

Committee in charge:
Professor Sara Johnson, Chair
Professor Michael Davidson
Professor Rachel Klein
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Professor Nicole Tonkovich

2012
This Dissertation of Jeffrey Charles Gagnon is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2012
DEDICATION

To my parents,
Who nurtured a young boy’s love of reading
and spared no expense
in making sure he always had books on his bookshelf.

To Jim,
Who had a vision for this project,
and who believed in both the person and the ideas,
long before it all began.

To Keris,
I am because we are.
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relationships, religion, and popular culture forever changed the way I think about the meaning of the connections that I analyze in this project. There are few words to fully describe the support that Jim has provided over the years. This project is a legacy to our friendship, and to the importance of those ongoing conversations.

My parents, Jim and Sheila, have been one hundred percent behind me in this process. They have patiently nurtured my love of reading and teaching and have unconditionally encouraged me to pursue my dreams. My Dad has always believed that the “cream rises to the top,” useful wisdom that has helped guide me through the challenges of graduate studies. My brothers, Dan, Brian, and Tom, have provided inspiration to me by the selfless approach they have each taken to their lives and passions. I admire each of them for what they do, but more importantly, how they do it.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

(Re)creating Social Life Out of Social Death:
Cross-Cultural Alliances in the Circum-Atlantic, 1760-1815

by

Jeffrey Charles Gagnon

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2012

Professor Sara Johnson, Chair

In (Re)creating Social Life Out of Social Death I analyze literary representations of historical cross-cultural alliances and political coalitions forged between subaltern groups. I argue that black Atlantic writers promoted intersubjective alliances in an attempt to address experiences of familial, cultural, and political alienation associated with the transatlantic slave trade, the philosophical foundations of Western Enlightenment, and the modern formations of liberalism. As many critics have shown, black Atlantic authors and texts promoted black personhood by simultaneously engaging with and reconfiguring western notions of literacy and self-possessive individualism. However, these studies tend to overemphasize the individual self-fashioning of black identities at the expense of interpersonal, reciprocal relations. While black Atlantic
authors and texts do highlight liberal individualism as a component of subjectivity, they also frame extreme individualism as a socially isolating component of western modernity. In doing so, they represent interpersonal relationships and collective experiences as integral to one’s understanding of personhood. Intersubjective recognition among black and Native subjects posed another form of resistance to the modern formation of the liberal subject as a rational, autonomous, political individual subject free from political and psychological dependence on others.

My study draws from and builds upon a growing body of scholarship emphasizing the importance of collectivity in eighteenth-century black Atlantic writing. However, these studies tend to emphasize relations among saltwater and plantation slaves. In contrast, my analysis addresses the active presence of Native culture and Native cultural ideas about political alliances, interpersonal networks, and notions of intersubjective belonging. Using the writings of Briton Hammon, Olaudah Equiano, and Paul Cuffe, I argue that black Atlantic writings from this period were part of larger, transnational conversations about and struggle over early meanings of cross-cultural, black-Native, intersubjectivity. In many cases, these alliances reconfigure human interdependence among people of color as positive features of human collectivity, rather than as degraded forms of pre-modern humanity.
Introduction

Black-Native Alliances in Circum-Atlantic Literature

Again it is desirable as we are social beings, and much of our happiness consisteth in those friendly interviews with each other, by way of conversation about various objects which may occur to our minds from time to time; and likewise friendly intercourse with Christian brethren, which afford a great source of happiness; while the slave is in a greater or less degree deprived of that enjoyment.

-Anonymous

One of the longest unwritten chapters in the history of the United States is that treating of the relations of the Negroes and the Indians. The Indians were already here when the white men came and the Negroes brought in soon after to serve as a subject race found among the Indians one of their means of escape.

-Carter G. Woodson

In 1808, an anonymous member of Boston’s African Society published an elaborate essay charging that the real crime of slavery was not only its limitations on individual freedoms but also its erasure of social connections. Considering that this argument emerges in a pivotal historical moment in which notions of liberal individualism were intertwined with discourses on slavery and freedom, this position is striking. It seems somewhat surprising that the author does not engage with popular

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1 This quotation can be found in the anonymously authored essay, “The Sons of Africans: An Essay on Freedom, With Observations on the Origin of Slavery” (1808), in Porter 19. There is some speculation as to whether Prince Saunders authored the quote, but I was unable to definitively confirm this at the time of writing. Saunders is a likely candidate for several reasons. First, he became a member of the African Society in 1808 at the time of publication. Second, he was a Dartmouth educated abolitionist who published several essays on the topic. Saunders eventually became a colonization advocate and worked closely with Paul Cuffe, whose writing represents the subject of chapter three. In contrast to Cuffe, who promoted a movement to Sierra Leone, Saunders favored Haiti. He eventually married Cuffe’s daughter and the two immigrated to Haiti.

2 This quotation was taken from Woodson 45.
political rhetoric that human bondage restricts individual autonomy. Instead, the essay points out that because all humans are “social beings,” human connection is a philosophical and practical imperative inextricably linked to intersubjective humanity.

An anonymously authored treatise on the social dimensions of black subjectivity is an ideal foundation from which to begin this project. In (Re)creating Social Life Out of Social Death, I seek to deepen our understanding of the workings of cross-cultural intersubjectivity in eighteenth and early nineteenth century black Atlantic literature. Black Atlantic writings in this period demonstrate a discursive skillfulness in defining the parameters of what it means to be a human being. As countless studies have shown, many black writers promote black subjectivity by engaging with the discourses self-possessive individualism. However, I argue that there has been a scholarly overemphasis on how black subjects self-fashioned individual identities. This overemphasis obscures the ways that some writers of the era foregrounded intersubjective recognition as essential to personhood. Black Atlantic writings also record the intersubjective-fashioning of black identities, confirming that many people of color understood themselves to be “social beings.” In these works, social alienation represents a prominent feature of enslavement. Popular tropes of familial separation, cultural disconnection, and community displacement signify the removal of a person’s humanity. In response to these losses, people of color struggled for intersubjective recognition by immersing

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3 The sources that support my understanding of the political foundations and historical relevance of liberalism in this era include Dillon; Lowe, Macpherson, Appleby, and Burgett. Readers should note that I elaborate on this point in the later stages of this Introduction.

4 In using the term “black Atlantic literature,” I am referring to written works from the late eighteenth century that emphasize the collective struggles of black peoples to resist the nationalistic forces of modernity.

5 The work of Benjamin and Butler informs my understanding of intersubjectivity.
themselves in a variety of interpersonal relationships, religious associations, and economic cooperatives. Writing played an essential part in this process. Many authors used the opening of their autobiographies to trace their family trees or to dedicate their publications to their communities. For those whose were born in Africa, their narratives document the brutal ways that slave merchants kidnapped them, removed them from intimate networks, and introduced them into relations of domination that failed to recognize their humanity. These depictions, frequently characterized by scholars as sentimental tropes intended to evoke readers’ sympathies, also poignantly chronicle a slave’s loss of intersubjectivity. By highlighting the significance of intersubjectivity in their writings, these authors struggle to discursively resist the damage wrought by social disconnection.

In my analysis, I draw from and build upon a growing body of scholarship emphasizing the importance of collectivity in eighteenth-century black Atlantic writing. Among contemporary scholars, Orlando Patterson argues for slavery as “social death” in his influential work, *Slavery and Social Death* (1982). He represents a starting point for understanding slavery as a “relation of domination” (38). Recent critics have developed Patterson’s analysis by exploring how slaves in the Americas formed new communities and alliances in response to social death. However, many of these studies tend to emphasize relations among saltwater and plantation slaves (Smallwood; Brown; Foster). In my analysis, I call greater attention to the role of Native communities and spaces in eighteenth century black Atlantic literature. I argue that black Atlantic texts also
represent Native people and spaces as holding the potential for intersubjective relations.\(^6\)

Tiya Miles is one of several recent scholars to highlight the significance of Native peoples and spaces to the African Diaspora (Miles; James F. Brooks; Naylor). However, within this growing collection of scholarship, few studies exist that closely examine the frequency and depth of black-Native alliances depicted in black-Atlantic texts, particularly in eighteenth century coastal contact zones. My project bridges this gap. However, by arguing for a closer look at interpersonal black-Native relations, I am not suggesting that these connections were utopian. The alliances that I find most relevant to this study involve delicate power imbalances, conflicts, and ideological contradictions. Instead of existing in a vacuum, these relations functioned within a matrix of other political, economic, and cultural connections. At times, subjects and communities must choose between their affiliations to one party over another. In my analysis, I consider the strategies used by members of both communities to offer cross-cultural recognition and to bridge cultural divisions.

Black Atlantic writing that focuses on the intersubjective fashioning of identity emerges during a period in which Lockean notions of the self-possessed, liberal individual emerged in transatlantic dialogue with Enlightenment treatises promoting rationality, reason, and the scientific mind. Freedom, egalitarianism, labor, and racialized slavery were mutually constitutive features of these circulatory discourses. Recent scholarship has scoured the writings of black Atlantic texts for evidence of the ways that subjects self-fashioned individual identities. In perhaps the most prominent example,

\(^6\) Other than Michael Gomez’s *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (1998), which provides a brief study of maroon communities in the Carolina and Georgia territories (182-184), these works tend to overlook the ways that people of African descent frequently turned to Native peoples not just for asylum, but also for intersubjective recognition.
Vincent Carretta argues that Olaudah Equiano responded to subjection by self-fashioning an individual identity through writing and print culture. “Print,” allowed him to “resurrect himself publicly” from the “social death’ slavery had imposed on him but also the millions of other diasporic Africans he represented” (367). This leads Carretta to use the trope of the self-made man to characterize Equiano’s success story (xi).7 Arguments for how Equiano, along with less visible writers, such as Venture Smith and Paul Cuffè, characterized their subjectivity as politically, economically, and psychologically individualistic have become accepted, in some cases, as the basic foundation for understanding these authors, their texts, and their larger political and philosophical concerns.

My project complicates these approaches by shining a spotlight on quotidian scenes of cross-cultural contact emphasizing intersubjective recognition. In doing so, I build upon Paul Gilroy’s work in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic” represents a geographical unit of analysis emphasizing the middle passage and “ships in motion” as “intercultural and transnational formation(s)” of black cultural identity in the western world (4). The key to what he calls the black “counterculture of modernity” is his analysis of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic that renders blacks and blackness as modernity’s Other. For Gilroy, creative works by black artists and intellectuals epitomize a “politics of transfiguration” by challenging modern formations of the nation and Enlightenment

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7 These studies have made significant contributions to the ways we understand black Atlantic texts. Therefore, they have much to teach us about the ways that these authors fought to define subjectivity in ways that liberal societies would recognize. To suggest otherwise is to overlook the creative ways that Equiano and others engaged with notions of liberalism, including freedom, self-possession, and the marketplace, to make claims for subjectivity.
discourses on liberty and rationality that inevitably denigrate black people as inferior (37-38). My project expands upon this argument in two ways. First, Gilroy’s emphasis on black hybridity does not accommodate how the cross-cultural interactions of black and Native peoples were critical to formations of black subjectivity and resistance to modernity. Second, intersubjective recognition among black and Native subjects poses another form of “counterculture” to the modern formation of the liberal subject as a rational, autonomous, political individual subject free from political and psychological dependence on others. The black Atlantic texts I study reconfigure human interdependence as a positive feature of human collectivity, rather than a degraded form of pre-modern humanity.

To develop this argument, I rely on a more inclusive definition of literature than is commonly found in traditional literary studies. I analyze a variety of literary texts produced in these communities, such as personal narratives, as-told-to biographies, diaries, logbooks, and personal letters. In using these sources, I explore the myriad ways that written texts produced in cross-cultural communities created, debated and articulated the terms and meanings of such connections. Certain forms of archival work have the benefit of humanizing those who have been objectified by government or religion-based records keeping practices. As Stephanie Smallwood argues, researchers can paint incredibly detailed impressions of the lives of slaves by probing the “hidden, internal

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8 For example, anyone who has attempted to use vital statistics research to uncover biographical information on a New England slave has encountered the absence of information, as if the person did not exist at all. This is contrasted with the experience of locating an abundance of records on the slave’s master and his extended family. The point is that the absence of information can also work to paint a picture of an individual’s living conditions and the value placed on his/her life by the society in which he/her lived.
transcript” of the archival record (5). Her methods demonstrate that archival work illuminates a “stark contrast between slave traders and slaves, between the traders’ will to commodify people and the captives’ will to remain fully recognizable as human subjects” (5). By using a range of methodological approaches, I align myself with scholars who use historical, social, political and economic data to contextualize personal accounts within specific moments and movements. For those studying early African-American and Native American texts, Brooks observes, “Our challenge in the field of early American minority literatures is to recognize that differences in content, shape, and texture, which have been read as markers of ‘inadequacy,’ are in fact elements of signification” (12). Her point is that how we read the archive is just as important as whether we incorporate it into our studies at all.

(Re)creating Social Life Out of Social Death

In this project, I understand intersubjectivity to mean an interactive process through which people understand themselves to be human. I arrive at this definition in part through a reading of black Atlantic literature. Many of these texts suggest that dialogic, interpersonal relationships and collective experiences are integral to one’s understanding of personhood. By extension, they imply that alienation from the process of intersubjective relations signals the absence of humanity. In arriving at this definition, I acknowledge the long history of the term and its multiple uses in a variety of fields and practices, from psychoanalysis to psychology to philosophy.9 The recent work of Jessica

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9 As Benjamin notes, Habermas used the phrase “the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding” to explain the “individual’s capacity within a social domain” (20).
Benjamin and Judith Butler also informs my understanding of this term. Benjamin
describes intersubjectivity as a process of mutual “recognition,” in which “subjects see
the Other as separate, but as structured psychically in ways that are shared” (132).
Arguing from a similar perspective, Butler maintains that intersubjectivity is “a process
that is engaged when subject and Other understand themselves to be reflected in one
another, but where this reflection does not result in a collapse of the one into the Other or
a projection that annihilates the alterity of the Other” (131-32). The emphasis here is on
the process of exchange that balances individual and collective needs with a subject’s
desire for power, control, and survival. Intersubjectivity denotes a delicate sense of
reciprocity between subjects that does not result in one subject seeking to dominate or
annihilate another.10

To develop an analysis of intersubjectivity in black Atlantic literature, I begin
with the tragic corollaries of these concepts—interpersonal alienation, communal
isolation, and cultural disconnection. Colonialism and slavery were institutions based
primarily on population management and control. In order to manage work production,
slave masters, missionaries, legal officials, and others invested in social control pursued
rigid forms of social organization. Policies ranged from restrictions on reproduction to

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10 Together, Butler and Benjamin draw upon and critique dialectical notions of intersubjectivity at work in
the Hegelian master-slave philosophical paradigm. The relevance of their work in relation to this project is
an understanding of reciprocal “recognition.” Benjamin takes issue with Hegel’s understanding of mutual
recognition in an intersubjective relationship:

The mutuality that is implied by the concept of recognition is a problem for the subject,
whose goal is only to be certain of himself. This absoluteness, the sense of being one
(“My identity is entirely independent and consistent”) and alone (“There is nothing
outside of me that I do not control”), is the basis for domination – and the master-slave
relationship. (33)

In Benjamin’s analysis of Hegel’s master-slave relationship, the notion of recognition renders a subject too
vulnerable to pursue intersubjectivity. As a result, masters pursue dominance and the enslavement of
others in order to avoid psychic fragility.
the limitations on contact between individuals and groups. From the outset those
opposed to these institutions objected to the way that slavery separated husbands from
wives, friends from one another, and children from their parents. The image of the slave
mother forcibly separated from her children has become the quintessential representation
of slavery’s destruction of kinship bonds. The anonymous author of the aforementioned
essay, “The Sons of Africans,” dramatizes this point. The essay asks, “What must be the
trials, the anxiety and the distress of the Africans? They who are thus separated, the
husband from the wife, and the wife from the husband; the parents from the children, and
the neighbours from neighbours” (21). This dissertation responds to this question by
probing the writings from these communities. As the essay itself implies, because they
were “social beings,” they fought to renew or “recreate” new communities, regardless of
how difficult or dangerous it may have been to do so.

That those in power intentionally tried to separate alienate subjects from
meaningful relationships suggests relational separation was a strategic tactic of
domination. This tactic implies two things. First, it intimates that close connections
could be potentially empowering for slaves. Close connections could alleviate suffering,
inspire confidence, and help slaves to remain human as masters attempted to transform
them into commercial objects. Second, and perhaps more dangerously, close connections
could lead to the spread of liberatory ideas and the sharing of radical politics and
resistance strategies. Masters wanting to ensure that slaves could not find positive
support with one another relied on disciplinary tactics designed to discourage close
interaction.¹¹ As Lisa Lowe remarks, “The repeated injunctions that different groups
must be divided and boundaries kept intact indicate that colonial administrators imagined
as dangerous the sexual, laboring, and intellectual contacts among slaves and indentured
nonwhite peoples” (203).¹² What Lowe proposes is that even everyday instances of
contact could threaten colonial power. That is why, as Saidiya Hartman argues, the
“purported dangers posed by slave gatherings and the great force used to meet and crush
them document the crisis of slavery and the attempt to manage this crisis by a combined
strategy of paternalism and brutal repression” (63). In short, even the most quotidian
instances of human connection threatened the institution of slavery.

As mentioned, Patterson coined the term “social death” to characterize this
phenomenon. In his comprehensive study, Patterson has offered a broad, comparative
analysis of slavery from Ancient Greece to the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. He
posits an abstract, metaphorical theory of social death, which he refers to as a
“preliminary definition of slavery on the level of personal relations” (13). According to
Patterson, for a slave to be socially dead was to be not only physically and emotionally
separated from kin relation and community, but also disconnected from one’s cultural
and spiritual ancestors. In this way, slaves “were not allowed freely to integrate the
experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social
reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living

¹¹ In contrasting these representations, I do not mean to suggest that a slave’s prior relations were utopian in any sense.
¹² The “indentured nonwhite peoples” she refers to in this argument were indentured Chinese laborers imported to the West Indies by British colonial officials seeking to replace one form of racialized and exploitative labor (slavery) with another. However, Lowe could just as easily be referring to the indigenous people of the continent who continued to experience much of the same forms of colonial exploitation during this period.
present in any conscious community of memory” (6). According to Patterson, this “relation of domination” was a tactic of terror and control, for “it was the slave’s isolation, his strangeness, that made him most valuable to the master” (38). The significance of social death as a model of slavery is its accent on the centrality of social relations to the institution of slavery. For the captured African slaves brought to the Americas, enslavement frequently meant the dissolution of most previous social networks. In many cases, kinship, friendship, and communal relations were dead, never to be revived again.

Despite the abstract approach to his study, Patterson’s theory resonates with how many eighteenth-century Black Atlantic slave narratives narrate the trauma of kin and communal separation. These descriptions imply that the first step in the transformation from subject to object occurs along relational lines. One example surfaces in the “Petition of an African Slave, to the legislature of Massachusetts,” authored by Belinda, a freed slave. Writing in the third person, she relies on sentiment to register the horror of communal fracture:

Could the tears, the sighs, the supplications, bursting from the tortured parental affection, have blunted the keen edge of avarice, she might have been rescued from agony, which many of her country’s children have felt, but which none have ever described. In vain she lifted her supplication voice to an insulted father, and her guiltless hands to a dishonoured deity! She was ravished from the bosom of her country, from the arms of her friends, while the advanced age of her parents rendering them unfit for servitude, cruelly separated them from her forever. (Carretta “Unchained Voices” 142)

Interestingly, Belinda invokes the metaphor of being “ravished from the bosom of her country,” to imply that slavery ripped her from the arms of her friends, family, community, and culture. In this description she argues that dehumanization begins with
relational disconnection. In doing so, she puts words to what “none have every
described.” For Belinda, to write about social death is to name it—and to identify its far-
reaching impact.

In the body of this dissertation, I argue that Olaudah Equiano represents similar
forms of kinship alienation in a poignant scene that occurs shortly after he describes the
severing of his connection with his sister and his survival during the middle passage. He
laments, “We were landed up a river, a good way from the sea, about Virginia county,
where we saw few of our native Africans, and not one soul who could talk to me…only
myself was left…In this state I was constantly grieving, and wishing for death rather than
anything else” (70). As Equiano represents his initial experiences of enslavement, it is
not surprising that he chooses to pinpoint his suffering as an extreme form of loneliness.
The nadir of enslavement and subjection is human disconnection. For Equiano, to be
objectified is to be socially disconnected from networks of affiliation. The significance
of these examples resides in their material realities. While each writer dramatizes both
sentimental and sensational descriptions of disconnection, it cannot be overlooked that
these are, to some degree, attempts to accurately represent how millions experienced the
trauma of being separated from actual human relationships. Writing about them was an
attempt to discursively resist kinship loss.

In addition to the permanent severing of kinship and community relations in
Africa, multiple generations of slaves in the Americas continued to symbolically
encounter a variety of social deaths. According to Stephanie Smallwood, death was an
ubiquitous feature of slave life. High mortality rates were common. Death marked each
stage in the process, from captivity and imprisonment on the African coast to the slave
ship and the brutality of the middle passage, in which men and women were subjected to immense suffering because of torture, murder, and disease (152). For those who survived the slave ship, high mortality rates continued in the Americas, particularly in the Caribbean. Disease, the horrific conditions of slave life, in which many slaves were worked to death, were persistent features of the social conditions of slavery in the Americas. These massive death tolls created a culture of social death. In addition, physical deaths combined with social separation as slaves who endured the middle passage together and formed temporary bonds were separated, never to see one another again. Masters’ participation in the marketplace meant that slaves could be bought and sold at any moment. Communities remained vulnerable to these socially destructive whims of masters. Social death was a permanent feature of slave life.

(Re)creating Social Life Out of Social Death

Because Patterson makes such a compelling case for slavery as social death, many critics continue to use it as a basis for analysis. In fact, most of the background scholarship I read on slavery and the Black Atlantic referenced social death in one form or another (Brooks; Gould; Carretta; Zafar; Foster). Without question, the concept has now become an accepted way of understanding slavery. Nevertheless, this is a theory that emphasizes a slave’s victimization. The focus on “death” accentuates the

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13 For a closer analysis of death aboard the slave ship, see Smallwood’s fifth chapter, “The Living Dead aboard the Slave Ship at Sea.”
14 As Brooks’ argues, “Free blacks hardly experienced more secure circumstances. In addition to inheriting the alienation inflicted on their enslaved ancestors, they were subject to states of being approximating slavery—indenture, military impressment, criminal incarceration, perpetual indebtedness; nor did their nominally ‘free’ status protect them from the dangers of kidnapping and resale” (98). I cite this quotation and its relevance to free men of color such as Paul Cuffé in chapter three.
permanence of loss. Because of this, studies that approach slavery from the perspective of social death often fail to consider how the enslaved created new forms of community in resistance to forced disconnection and alienation. In its entirety my dissertation suggests that slaves and other disenfranchised people sought whatever means necessary to find new forms of community, regardless of how fleeting or risky these connections might be. According to Vincent Brown, a Diaspora historian and recent critic of Patterson’s theory, “Rather than pathologizing slaves by allowing the condition of social death to stand for the experience of life in slavery, then, it might be more helpful to focus on what the enslaved actually made of their situation” (1236). Brown’s point somewhat overlooks the fact that Patterson intended his theory to be more of a broad-reaching metaphor, rather than an actual description of social living conditions. Nevertheless, his point is well taken. Investigating “what the enslaved actually made of their condition” can yield rich new insights into how slaves pursued social connections despite their living conditions. Arguing a similar point, Franklin Knight maintains that the material realities of social death do not adequately address the new communities that slaves and their descendants continued to build in the Americas. He charges, “The development of viable Afro-American communities throughout the Americas does not in any way negate the fact that slavery was a dehumanizing experience permeated with violence and exploitation. Nevertheless, the image of ‘social death’ is greatly exaggerated” (105 fn 12). For these scholars, the abstraction of social death obscures the creative ways that the enslaved recreated social life.

Following the criticisms offered by Brown and Knight, my work pushes past a study of relational loss. This is because those who survived the middle passage
demonstrated the remarkable capacity to form new friendships, family circles, and communal bonds in the Americas. This is the rationale for the phrase “(Re)creating Social Life” in front of “Social Death” in the title of my project. This phrase is meant to draw attention to how blacks and Natives alienated by enslavement and colonialism “recreated” new social communities in the wake of social death. The term “recreating” calls forth the image of revival. I am thinking here of how the struggle for human connection animates the search for new forms of connection, wherever it can be found. The term also plays on the word “creativity,” which invokes a sense of imagination. These relationships imply that those searching for connection found friends in unusual places. Pairings include a Massachusetts slave with a struggling tribe of coastal Florida Indians; a manumitted slave and a Native leader from Central America; and a black-Native ship captain from Massachusetts and a group of ex-slaves and free-blacks living on the African coast. My study suggests that these imaginative connections were not anomalies in the early Atlantic.

Black Atlantic essays, narratives, poems, and letters provide myriad descriptions of how the exploited and oppressed resisted alienation by forming new and creative communities. In some cases, these were major movements. They created and joined new religious communities. They organized social and charitable organizations. They formed secret societies, such as the Freemasons. They also formed antislavery groups. While they did not always succeed in resolving the problems of alienation and degradation, they did provide some measure of relief for those alienated from kin, culture, and community. However, this project does not investigate large-scale, revolutionary movements. Some of the most compelling examples of how black and Native authors described the forging
of meaningful bonds can be found in what appear to be unremarkable scenes of connection. I am most interested in how early black Atlantic texts document even the simplest, most basic instances of intersubjectivity. For example, in Chapter One, my reading of Briton Hammon’s experiences among Florida Natives pivots on his one phrase, “They us’d me pretty well” (24). In Chapter Two, I provide a critical reading of Equiano’s temporary relationship with the young Miskitu Prince George. Traveling together from England to Central America, the two strike up a brief but important spiritual connection that is not revolutionary in any sense, and yet, as I argue, it is vitally important to Equiano’s spiritual intersubjectivity in that moment. In Chapter Three I critically analyze Paul Cuffe’s creation of the Friendly Society of Sierra Leone, a multi-ethnic mix of marginalized people of color who seek economic and political justice in the fledgling British colony. The Society is not a transformative union of rebels that radically undermines British colonialism; however, its emphasis on intersubjective spirituality and economic cooperation provides its members empowering optimism in the face of the exploitative economic tactics of local officials.15

The significance of this analysis, and its relation to social death, can be found in Brown’s observations of the direction scholars must take new studies of social death. While he applauds recent studies that examine the “personal damage wrought by

15 Recent scholarship explores the stories of major alliances in Atlantic and Caribbean zones of contact. For example, Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh’s The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (2003) makes a compelling case for how the multi-ethnic motley crews of the British maritime world were responsible for circulating the revolutionary ideas that defined the age. Jane Landers’ recent book, Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions (2010), relates the story of radical cross-cultural alliances in the circum-Caribbean, from Haiti to Cuba to Florida and the Gulf South. However, much of Landers’ work revolves around black-Native alliances in Florida. Sara E. Johnson’s recent book, The Fear of French Negroes: Transcolonial Collaboration in the Revolutionary Americas (2012), examines strategic cross-cultural collaborations within Caribbean circuits of exchange in the wake of the Haitian Revolution.
slavery,” he argues that this focus obscures “two generations of social history that have demonstrated slaves’ remarkable capacity to forge fragile communities, preserve cultural inheritance, and resist the predations of slaveholders” (1239). Closer examination indicates that somewhat everyday experiences of bonding demonstrate creative ways that quotidian subjects generate new forms of “fragile communities.” Seemingly ordinary moments of human connection represent essential social opportunities for those who have experienced the trauma of social death.

Black Atlantic writings document the creative ways that denigrated men and women of color responded to social death by creating new communities. In this regard “community” is a heavily loaded term. Occasionally, it can be used to romanticize bygone eras, where supposedly better times were at hand. As Miranda Joseph argues, it historically invokes a sense of “nostalgia” or a yearning for pre-modernist societies, when relationships were based on “local” connections and “face-to-face” contact (“Against the Romance” 1). Community positively implies a warm and open sense of belonging. As she argues, it a space of “understanding, caring, cooperation, equality,” that further invokes a utopian image of harmonious relationships. However, the term also gestures toward cultural homogeneity and thus masks the presence of discord that should be expected in any relationships. For these reasons, Joseph challenges scholars to “recuperate and rearticulate the needs and desires for social change that are so often coopted by the uncritical deployment of the term” (60).

To avoid romanticizing cross-cultural alliances, I historically contextualize them, paying special attention to situations and circumstances that give way to cross-cultural strife. This is partly because the texts I examine do not suggest that black-Native
communities were utopian formations. They were full of conflict and marked by disagreement and divergent political and economic agendas. In the case of Briton Hammon, it is difficult to describe his experiences among the Native people in his text as free of discord, especially when we consider that they may have forcibly dragged him ashore against his will and later received payment for his transfer to Cuba. Similarly, Olaudah Equiano’s brief alliance with Prince George, which appeared to temporarily relieve the two men from the burdens of racialized othering, does not last long. In the case of Paul Cuffe, his attempts to build unity among members of the Friendly Society were rife with possibility and optimism. They were full of disagreement and differences of opinion. Indeed, these differences represent some of the most compelling sites of analysis in this project.

Writers inscribed their membership in social circles as a response to social death by identifying social networks to which slaves belonged. James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw’s *A Narrative of the Most remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, As related by himself* (1772) opens by proclaiming, “I Was born in the City BOURNOU; my mother was the eldest daughter of the reigning King there, I was the youngest of six children, and particularly loved by my mother, and my grand-father almost doated (sic) on me” (34). Similarly, in John Jea’s *The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher* (1773), he writes, “I, John Jea, the subject of this narrative, was born in the town of Old Callabar, in Africa, in the year 1773. My father's name was Hambleton Robert Jea, my mother's name Margaret Jea; they were of poor, but industrious parents” (3). In another example, Venture Smith’s *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But*
Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America, Related by Himself (1798), opens with recollection of his kinship network. He outlines, “I WAS born at Dukandarra, in Guinea, about the year 1729. My father's name was Saungm Furro, Prince of the Tribe of Dukandarra. My father had three wives...By his first wife he had three children. The eldest of them was myself, named by my father, Broteer” (370). By explicitly identifying these networks, Gronniosaw, Jea, and Smith participate in a literary resistance to social death. Although writing cannot bring back the material reality of those relations, writing has the effect of resisting their annihilation. In short, writing represents one way of (re)creating socially disconnected relations. By outlining their relational networks, these authors proclaimed their subjectivity. These genealogies identify the circles into which these men were born, and the people who once recognized them as human beings.

Other writers dedicated their writing to friends, family members, and to the human community at large. They sought to establish relational bonds with imagined communities that could, in turn, allow them to reclaim a sense of personhood. In the opening lines of his autobiographical slave narrative, Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, A Black Preacher, Written by Himself, during his Residence at Kingswood School (1798), King declares, “However, such as it is, I present it to the Friends of Religion and Humanity, hoping that will be of some use to mankind” (351). Similarly, Equiano dedicates his Interesting Narrative to his close friends. In doing so, he professes that the act of writing and publishing is not selfishly motivated. Rather, he hopes his story will “afford any satisfaction to my numerous friends” (43). Of those friends who eventually read his autobiography, this acknowledgment would not seem odd. In fact, based on the construction of his life story, it makes sense that he would dedicate the act of writing a
personal story to a larger social network. As I hope to make clear in Chapter Two, Equiano’s gesture was not simply a dedication owed to conventional literary form. It represents a consistent approach to the telling of his life story.

As the anonymous author quoted at the outset of this chapter might argue, because these people were first and foremost “social beings,” these unremarkable instances of connection were integral for a slave’s survival. Despite its focus on the nineteenth century, Saidiya Hartman’s analysis of collective gatherings among plantation slaves provides a roadmap for unraveling the significance of earlier moments of community building. In chapter two of *Scenes of Subjection Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997), Hartman uses networks of affiliation to explain the differences between the slave master’s desire for total subjection and the slave’s hunger to remain human. In doing so, she looks closely at relatively minor acts of social connection. These include moments of “stealing away,” late night dances, and other forms of unlicensed collectivity (63). Hartman identifies these gatherings, set within the context of extreme terror and brutal subjugation, as symbolic acts that “defied and redefined their condition of absolute abjection” (63). The lynchpin to Hartman’s argument rests on her philosophical and political analysis of a slave’s subjection and subsequent resistance to that subjection. She argues, “the rights of the self-possessed individual and the set of property relations that define liberty depend upon, if not require, the black as will-less actant and sublime object” (62). Through the process of negation, the figure of the slave in early liberal societies invigorated definitions of liberty, citizenship, and elite, white, male equality. Dominant political and legal discourses defined the subjugation of a slave as chattel—without rights, unable to possess one’s own
body or labor, socially alienated, without will, and wholly dependent. As Brooks so aptly summarizes (in the second quotation included at the outset of this chapter), “Alienation, dependency, deprivation, degeneracy, dissolution—these were the values assigned blackness and Indianness within racist scientific and political discourse” (46). Hartman argues that if we extend this logic, we arrive at a definition of subjectivity that extends beyond liberty, property, and self-possession. What she seems to be arguing, but never explicitly proclaims, is that for slaves, agency in pursuit of intersubjectivity was the key to resistance, and to humanity.

Similar to the anonymous author of “The Sons of Africans” essay, Hartman anchors her analysis to the position that slaves were social beings. She does not look for examples of individual agency that define slaves as individual, self-possessed men and women. She reads testimonies from Works Progress Administration interviews, which provide several poignant examples of how slaves used collective gatherings as a form of subjective resistance. One former slave, John McAdams, pinpoints the crucial formation of quotidian, intersubjective relations as a defining feature of resistance. He writes, “Of course us negroes just lived for them negro dances we had every Saturday night there on the farm—no one to bother or interfere with us and believe me son, we made good use of these nights as that was all the time the slaves had together to dance, talk and have a good time among their own color (emphasis hers)” (60). As Hartman argues, this attempt to build “community among ourselves” signifies a conscious endeavor to remain human (61). These are intentional gatherings “forged in the context of disrupted affiliations, sociality amid the constant threat of separation” (59). When a slave exercises a form of agency by running away to visit a loved one, and when a group of slaves steals away
under the cover of night to be together outside the surveillance of the master, in effect
they are exercising a form of personhood. She argues:

> The significance of becoming or belonging together in terms other than those defined by one’s status as property, will-less object, and the not-quite-human...is a becoming together dedicated to establishing other terms of sociality, however transient, that offer a small measure of relief from the debasements constitutive of one’s condition. (61)

In this argument, personhood emerges through acts of agency *in pursuit of* community.

I build on Hartman’s work by extending her analysis of subjectivity, agency, and collectivity to include black-Native intersubjectivity in the eighteenth century. What she implies in this position, but never explicitly argues for, is that “community among ourselves” generates a form of intersubjectivity that is essential to resisting social death. Relationships are firmly interwoven into the fabric of human subjectivity. Smallwood captures the essence of this argument when she argues, “The slave ship at sea produced an African narrative of persistent and often lonely attempts among the captives to continue to function as subjective beings—persons possessing independent will and agency” (123). Even minor instances of human connection, whether in the form of conversation, company, spiritual conversation, dancing, or even physical intimacy, could offer relief from the totalitarian subjection of slavery. If social death is a form of subjection, or an erasure of subjectivity, then social life helps reclaim that subjectivity.

By arguing for an intersubjective analysis of black-Native alliances in the Atlantic world, my project challenges historical approaches to the study of literary texts in the early United States. No text better encapsulates these methodologies than that of R. W. B. Lewis’s *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955). Lewis argues that the mythological figure of Adam represents the
quintessential symbol of U.S. literature. This image represents authors such as Whitman, Hawthorne, and Cooper, and characters such as Natty Bumppo. The “American Adam” is an individual “emancipated from history, bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources” (5). For those interested in placing African-American men (or in the case of Equiano, men who may or may not have actual natal ties to the United States) at the forefront of this tradition, the argument would look something like this—those who experienced social death were certainly “emancipated from history” and “bereft of ancestry.” However, there are major differences between the “American Adam” and figures such as Hammon or Equiano. In these writings, a subject’s lack of history or disconnections to ancestry is not to be celebrated, but rather mourned. When Carretta suggests that Equiano experienced social death by prioritizing and promoting his independent, individual self, he is ironically implying that Equiano dealt with relational loss by further alienating himself from others, instead of by building new relationships. I agree with Joanna Brooks, who argues, “The earliest African-American and Native American authors did not share in this mythology” (7).

Another problem with this approach involves the ways that discourses of self-made individualism degrade relational concepts of dependency and interdependency. In the Revolutionary and early Republican eras, those who championed political forms of self-reliant individualism frequently denigrated people of color and women as inferior, overly-dependent others. In these discourses, people of color, women, and the poor represent unenlightened, uncivilized others—figures of negation that buttress the
subjectivity of elite, white, males. In the process, dependence, as well as its multiple connotations, emerges as a denigrated concept associated with disempowerment and subjection. Wendy Brown argues, “the putative autonomy of the liberal subject partakes of a myth of masculinity requiring the disavowal of dependency, the disavowal of the relations that nourish and sustain this subject” (157). What Brown calls the “disavowal of dependency” has the effect of associating relational dependence as a form of degraded subjection that must be avoided at all costs. Stated another way, self-made, possessive individualism in the liberal tradition conflates political dependency with psychological and emotional weakness. It promotes a degraded form of human psychology that racializes and feminizes the desire for human connection. It associates the need for connection with a psychological sense of vulnerability to be avoided at all costs. To need human connection, or to participate in interdependent relationships, is to project a diminished view of subjectivity.

As the texts in this dissertation make clear, emotional, spiritual, and intersubjective self-reliance for slaves and other disenfranchised people of color was a humanizing force with the potential to grant personhood to those who sought it at all costs. Interdependence with others need not be devalued. In a critique of individualism, education reformer John Dewey writes, “No man and no mind was ever emancipated merely by being left alone” (qtd. in Albrecht 7). As the texts I explore make clear, dependence on others was a crucial means of maintaining humanity, resisting exploitation, and developing a deeper sense of human connectedness with those in similar circumstances.
By engaging with notions of dependency, my project considers the importance of gender formations in discursive representations of black-Native affiliations. In the chapters that follow, I have selected texts written by men of color that mostly depict male-male relations. Black Atlantic texts depict interdependent relations among men of color as positive and empowering connections, rather than as effeminate forms of reliance on others. They collapse differences between rugged self-reliance and extreme dependency. In the process, they represent cross-cultural relations as alternative forms of subjectivity. In addition, in these texts, men of color have the privilege of pursuing employment in the circum-Atlantic world of maritime labor, despite the various forms of degraded inequality they encountered as abject subjects in this culture. Black and Native women did not enjoy the privilege of mobility. It is not surprising that women tend to occupy a land-based sense of containment in these texts. The larger point is that in many coastal spaces, particularly in New England, black-Native alliances emerged because men’s access to the sea meant that they were exposed to the dangers of maritime industries and often did not return home. High mortality rates among Native men in the whaling industries of Nantucket, meant that Native women frequently turned to other men of color, including African slaves and free black men, to build new families.

My project features “cross-cultural” as another key term central to my analysis of texts. Many black Atlantic scholars have convincingly argued that those who survived the middle passage were diverse mixture of African peoples who formed heterogeneous communities upon arriving in the Americas (Gilroy; Smallwood; Gomez). Diaspora scholars have documented that slave communities throughout North America were represented by many different African cultural groups, and these include, but are not
limited to, the Akan, Ga, Guan, Adangbe, Wew, Angolans, Biafrans, and Senegambians (Smallwood 188-189). Survivors of the middle passage brought with them a variety of different religious and cultural practices, and these were circulated widely. Once here, African slaves crossed some of the distinctive cultural divides by forming new friendships and by preserving old customs, sharing and blending practices, and creating new forms. In addition, as older generations of slaves made families, these newer generations mingled with older ones. All the while, newly captivated slaves were constantly introduced to existing slave communities. As Smallwood explains, “This circulation of people as commodities gave diasporic Africa its distinctive cast: slave communities came to embrace a heterogeneous assortment of ‘seasoned’ Africans, American-born children, and the ‘new Negroes’ who repeatedly arrived by ship” (200).

The distinctive cross-cultural nature of relationships among Africans represents one reason why it makes sense to approach a study of eighteenth century black Atlantic texts from this perspective.

Hammon’s Narrative, Equiano’s Interesting Narrative and Cuffe’s logbook and letters represent life on the Atlantic periphery as a series of cross-cultural encounters. Texts written by and about African-Americans and Natives in the latter half of the eighteenth century reveal numerous other examples of quotidian, black-Native affiliation. They coincide with a rise in publications by black and Native authors during this period. Lucy Terry’s poetic representation of the Native attack on Deerfield residents in “Bars Fight” (1746) serves as a precursor to this genre. As Sharon Harris argues, in satirizing the Indian captivity narrative, it consciously adopts one of most popular genres of early Euro-American literature (151). This places it “at the forefront of a significant tradition.
in African American literary tradition” (151). Terry’s poem represents a discursive black-Native bond that materializes through poetry. One of the first known documents written by Phillis Wheatley echoes this bond. In her letter to Christian Mohegan Minister, Samson Occom, she gratefully acknowledges Occom’s teachings on the injustices of slavery and colonialism (Wheatley). It is significant that one of Wheatley’s few direct commentaries on slavery takes place in an epistolary exchange with a Mohegan leader. It suggests that black and Native men and women frequently recognized one another as allies in a shared struggle for subjectivity. Although Occom’s letters to Wheatley have not been discovered, it is known that because they shared access to similar social and spiritual circles, they exchanged at least a few letters with one another. Similarly Occom’s writings include many references to black-Native affiliations among tribes situated along the Connecticut coastline. His prose essay, “The Most Remarkable and Strange State, Situation, and Appearance of Indian Tribes In This Great Continent (1783), sharply criticizes the “Nations, that inslave the poor Negroes in Such Barbarous manner” (59). His sermon, “Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself,” (1787) is a dynamic reflection on relationships, equality, and the hypocrisy of white Christians who practice slavery. In addition, the Mohegan Minister was also known to correspond with the African-American preacher Lemuel Haynes. His journal indicates he sold Haynes a copy of John Eliot’s Algonkian-language Bible (Brooks 206 fn7).^{16} Taken

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^{16} In addition to these literary exchanges, it is important to note the subject of black-Native relations was a controversial one in Occom’s time. This was particularly true with regard to determination of land rights and tribal sovereignty in southeastern New England and later, in upstate New York. Occom and other tribal leaders fought to exclude tribal members with African ancestry in order to protect the tribe’s land rights (Brooks “Samson Occom” 143, 139fn153).
together, the earliest works in the African American canon consciously attend to relational bonds with Native Americans. In returning to Terry’s poem, it appears to mock white “captivity” at the hands of Native peoples. In doing so, it echoes the works of Wheatley and Occom, which reflect on the shared experiences of captivity and slavery endured by African and Native peoples on the continent.

In addition to the works of Wheatley, Occom, and Terry, the black preacher John Marrant also includes a pivotal encounter of black-Native intersubjectivity in his writing. Marrant’s *A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black* (1785), describes an encounter with a Cherokee hunter in the wilderness outside Charleston, South Carolina. In conversation, Marrant is surprised to discover that the unnamed Cherokee actually knows Marrant’s family. He writes, “[He] said, I know you, and your mother and sister; and upon a little further conversation I found he did know them, having been used in winter to sell skins in our Town” (117). Those writing about this scene usually overlook this pivotal detail, which suggests that Marrant’s female relatives are somehow linked to the Cherokee trade networks. This subtle detail puts black families in Charleston at the crossroads of Native circulations of goods and ideas in this period. Similarly, in Boston King’s autobiography, also centered on Charleston, he describes how his mother learned herbal remedies from local Native women and used these to treat local slaves. He writes, “My mother was employed chiefly in attending upon those that were sick, having some knowledge of the virtue of herbs, which she learned from the Indians” (106). King’s mother participates in a network of black and Native women sharing cultural ideas along the Southeastern coastline.
Not all of these texts describe amicable relations or positive interactions. Some clearly identify the breakdown of intersubjective relations and the trauma associated with those instances of disconnection. In one brief but compelling section of John Jea’s *Narrative*, he recounts his brief marriage to a Native woman while living in New York. He relates the details of his wife’s conflicted struggles to convert to, and eventually resist, Christian teachings. Her turmoil culminates in a fit of mental illness, during which time she takes her newborn daughter’s life. Local authorities subsequently execute her for her crime (44-48). His wife’s resistance to his Christian beliefs represents an ideological conflict that leads to the traumatic dismantling of their family. Jea depicts his wife’s mental deterioration as an individual weakness, absolving his own responsibility for failing to address his wife’s repeated concerns with conversion. A less traumatic instance of conflict materializes in Venture Smith’s autobiography. Also a maritime man, Smith describes working and trading on his self-owned ship with Native boatsmen along the Connecticut coastline. During one episode he is unlawfully punished by a white magistrate after one of the Native men accidentally spills a barrel of molasses overboard, ruining the profits of a local white merchant (384). In this scene, black and Native men are not allies and their relationships are far from intersubjective. Taken together, the writings of Jea and Smith represent black-Native encounters as damaging and traumatic engagements that remind the authors of the degraded place for people of color in colonial societies.
(Re)creating Social Life in Native Spaces

In the chapters that follow, I analyze how Native lands and communities were often sanctuaries for marginalized blacks during this era. According to Woodson, quoted in the epigraph to this Introduction, many slaves sought “rescue” among Native peoples across the continent in the eighteenth century. I historicize and contextualize each of the relationships that I examine. Adopting this methodology means that I identify and highlight the presence and participation of Native peoples in the maritime circulation of culture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Chapter One, I argue that scholars have yet to even consider the identities of the Natives that attack Briton Hammon’s ship and bring him ashore, and this context may change the way we think about his story. In this analysis, I piece together the research of Native scholars and historians to speculate as to how these Natives may have recognized an enslaved black man working on a British ship in the 1740s. As with many other Native groups in the Southeast, the Calusa had a long history of welcoming escaped slaves and oppressed free blacks into their ranks. In Chapter Two, my study of the Miskitu leader Prince George considers the fascinating history of the Miskitu people who lived on the eastern shores of what is today known as Nicaragua. According to historians, a series of shipwrecked slavers allowed many Africans to escape into the dense forests located along the Miskito coast, where they found hospitable Native groups who often welcomed them into their communities.

In addition to those I examine in the body of this project, there are other examples of Natives who provided relief to slaves or even escape from slavery that are worth mentioning here. It is not well known that in the eighteenth century, the Reverend
Eleazar Wheelock’s Moor’s Indian Charity School, located in Connecticut and home to prominent Native students such as the aforementioned Occom, as well as Joseph Johnson, and David Fowler, also relied on slave labor (Calloway 1). Very little archival sources exist that indicate how or whether these slaves interacted with Wheelock’s students, save for one brief example. According to Wheelock, a young Delaware student named Calvin “forged a pass for a Negro” while living at Moors (McCallum 47). As Helen Jaskoski observes, Calvin ironically uses his literacy skills, acquired through Wheelock’s tutelage, to help Wheelock’s slave escape to possible freedom (24). Wheelock was furious. Calvin was subsequently arrested and sent to prison (24). While details remain elusive regarding the content of this pass, the act serves as a fitting description of how some blacks and Natives used writing to form new and even liberating connections in response to alienation. In this case, Calvin’s pass represents a text that iterates the power of temporary black-Native bonds in early America.

David George’s An Account of the Life of Mr. David George, from Sierra Leone in Africa; given by himself in a Conversation with Brother Rippon of London, and Brother Pearce of Birmingham (1793) offers a complicated look at the possibilities and pitfalls of escaped slaves living in Native spaces. He describes leaving his plantation after deciding to “[run] away up among the Creek Indians” (334). The Creek welcome George, but they relegate him to an ambiguous form of servitude. He lived among them for less than a year, during which time he “worked hard” but “the people were kind to me” (334). The kindness that he receives is juxtaposed with the subtext of his inferior status. While he experiences more humanizing conditions than he did among white slaveholders in Virginia, he is still not a fully free man. After his master’s son tracks
George to Creek territory, he runs away again, this time to live among the Natchez.

Welcomed once again by the community, he learns to “mend deer skins” (334). Later, he marries Phillis, a Creek woman (334). For George, recreating social life out of social death takes place in the confines of southeastern Native circles, even as he experiences a modified form of liberty among them.

One often-overlooked text published in the nineteenth century also represents Native spaces as intersubjective safe havens for black people. This text emphasizes the importance of socially constructed gender roles in these texts. In his autobiography The Life of William J. Brown of Providence (1883), Brown relates a story of cross-cultural relations in his family heritage that captures the spirit of my interest in this project. Born in 1814 in Providence, R.I., Brown was the son and grandson of slaves on both sides of his family tree. However, on his mother’s side he was also the great-grandson of a prominent Narragansett Chief named Jeffery. Sometime during the 1760s, Brown’s maternal grandmother (and Jeffery’s daughter), a widow named Chloe Prophet, used her own money to purchase her husband out of slavery and free him. Chloe’s decision to remarry a black man who was not of the tribe angered her father, so he refused to support the marriage. However, she went on to have five children, one of whom was Brown’s mother, and she eventually reconciled with her father. In fact, Brown reports attending a traditional Narragansett funeral for his grandmother (5). Why did Chloe risk her relationships to kin and community in order to marry her husband? According to Brown,

17 According to Brown, his last name comes from the fact that his grandfather, Cudge, was captured in Africa and survived the middle passage, only to become the personal slave of the prominent Moses Brown family in Providence.
she “purchased her husband from the white people in order to change her mode of living” (4).

Chloe Prophet’s decision, as portrayed in her grandson’s personal narrative, highlights gendered differences in how men and women of color responded to social alienation. When Prophet proclaimed that she wanted to change her “mode of living,” she implies that she no longer wanted to be socially alienated as a Native woman living in a time of massive male population loss. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, devastating changes to Narragansett lifeways and material living conditions contributed to numerous black-Native marriages in southeastern New England. After King Philip’s War, and throughout the eighteenth century, northeastern Native tribes, particularly those along the coast, experienced dramatic declines in male population due to warfare (including both colonial attacks on tribes and men serving in colonial militias), disease, and the dangers of maritime labor. Many wives became widows, and perhaps this is what happened to Chloe. To survive as a single woman, it is possible that she indentured herself out to a local family. If so, she may have been forced to do so because of outstanding debts to local whites. During this period, many Native women worked as indentured servants in terrible conditions in white homes. They lived away from the tribe. Often they worked alongside men. This is likely how Chloe met her husband. As historian Daniel Mandell suggests, indentured servitude brought together men and women of different cultural backgrounds (43). Exogamous marriages between Native women and African and African-American men occurred with greater frequency between the Revolutionary period and 1815 (43). It is possible that Chloe and her husband met in
the confines of a colonial household. Perhaps they found solace in the company of those who were equally lonely, separated from kin, and desperate for community.18

This example of a quotidian cross-cultural relationship, as well as the others mentioned above, has much to tell us about some of the ways that disenfranchised men and women came together to form new relationships in the circum-Atlantic world. As Miles has argued, “African American resistance strategies, social worlds, and subjectivities have long been inflected by the idea of immigration to Native American spaces and of literal and metaphorical relationships with American Indian peoples, even as indigenous societies and cultures have been influenced by the arrival of these newcomers” (9). In the case of Chloe Prophet’s marriage to an African slave in Rhode Island, we see that her relationships to her family and her tribe were threatened by her bringing an outsider into the community. From her perspective, she hoped that such a marriage could bring a sense of stability and perhaps even vitality to her living conditions. From her unnamed husband’s perspective, a cross-cultural union with a

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18 Economic and gender-related factors represent other reasons why Chloe Prophet may have wanted to “change her mode of living” in marrying an enslaved black man. During this era, some northeastern Native tribes did their best to support widows, but the sheer number of fatherless families might have led to insufficient tribal resources. Either way, some Native women may have felt that remarrying outside the tribe helped provide for themselves and their children. Perhaps Chloe was no different. Of course, enslaved African men may have turned to these marriages for similar benefits. Certainly, Chloe’s husband earned his freedom. And because of slavery laws in northeastern states at this time, marriage to a Native woman meant that children were born free instead of as slaves. On a related note, Native historians argue that many tribes experienced changes in gender roles during this era. Before European contact, many Native communities experienced somewhat more fluid gender roles when it came to labor. Women generally performed agricultural and household duties, while men hunted, fished, and traded. Some tribes began to adopt European-based divisions of labor, in which women were encouraged to remain in the home while men farmed. According to Mandell, “Exogamous marriages and state laws allowed Indian women to hold far more political and economic power than their white and black contemporaries. Although the largely familial authority of Indian women had roots in aboriginal culture, it was renewed by the extended absences of Indian men and the increasing “adoption of black or white husbands who, as outsiders, lacked the status of those born into the community” (40).
Narragansett woman meant freedom for himself and for his children. One wonders how he may have discussed this with Chloe Prophet at the time.

Considering the story of Chloe Prophet as part of a cultural trend of intermarriages between African-American men and Native women, for many black men in the eighteenth century, relationships with Native women provided access to safety and intersubjectivity. Eighteenth and early nineteenth-century texts and cultural histories include many similar examples of cross-cultural sanctuary and intermarriage. In texts cited above, men like John Marrant, Briton Hammon, and Olaudah Equiano, found Native relational networks to be liberating spaces, during which time they experienced temporary relief from the debasement of slavery and racialized oppression. With regard to intermarriages, maritime sailor John Jea temporarily settled down from his life abroad to marry a Native woman in New York. David George may have as well. Both Paul Cuffe and his father, Kofi Slocum, married Native women from southeastern Massachusetts and found hospitality in the coastal Native communities of Cape Cod and Martha’s Vineyard. Philadelphia antislavery activist, author, and sail-maker James Forten also married a Native woman, Charlotte Vandine (Winch 179). Nineteenth-century author Nancy Gardner Prince writes in her autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1853), that her grandfather was a slave who married a Native woman: “My grandmother was an Indian of this country; she became a captive of the English or their descendants” (1). They met and married near the small port city of Gloucester, Massachusetts.

These quotidian examples of cross-cultural marriages indicate that some major figures in early African-American literature and history have significant ties to Native
American culture. Some were born into Native communities, while others chose to marry into them. They did so for a variety of reasons. Most sought intersubjectivity not offered by mainstream societies characterized by slavery and racialized oppression. They sought better economic opportunities for themselves and their families. Others pursued opportunities for intimacy and safety not offered elsewhere. Despite the fact that these examples occupy relatively minor parts in larger literary works, these bonds represent opposition to the disconnection and population management that were hallmarks of colonial and slave societies. This makes them small but significant examples of how relationships offered resistance to imperialism, slavery, and colonialism.

This study examines the active presence of Native culture and Native cultural ideas about community. In doing so, it incorporates Native Studies scholarship that emphasizes the significance of communal relationships and networks to early Native American studies. By recognizing the work of Native scholars, my dissertation addresses the importance of a Native-studies approach to black-Native interactions. Lisa Brooks’ compelling work has been a major influence in this regard. Brooks invokes the metaphor of the “common pot” to argue that any analysis of eighteenth-century Native culture must attend to the importance of relational networks to Algonquian lifeways. In that era, the common pot was a literal dish prepared in each home and used to nourish family, neighbors and even outsiders. In addition, it was also a ceremonial representation and a literary metaphor consistently invoked by Native leaders, activists, and writers. It articulates the importance of shared communal ideas and resources, including food and land, especially for those whose lives were severely disrupted by colonial intrusion to Native spaces.
The image of a literary and figurative “common pot” in Native culture is an important one for my analysis in this dissertation. In chapter one, I consider both its literal and figurative uses in my analysis of Briton Hammon’s relationship with the Calusa. In writing about his time in Florida, Hammon reveals that the Calusa shared their food with him, which was a source of comfort to him (7). This subtle but meaningful revelation is a sign that they hospitably welcomed him as a stranger into their community. I base this claim on Brooks’ arguments, but I also connect it to relevant Native Studies scholarship pertaining to Florida. The addition of this work enhances my position that Hammon was less a captive enemy and more a rescued slave in this narrative.

I also incorporate the metaphor of the common pot in my analysis of Paul Cuffè’s work in Sierra Leone. Most scholars seem to believe that Cuffè rejected his Native culture in favor of an African identity. I argue that this position overlooks his childhood spent in Native communities, as well as the lifelong bonds he maintained with his mother, his wife, his extended family relations, and many of his friends. Regardless of whether Cuffè publicly identified himself as an “Indian,” he certainly maintained close personal relations with those who did. This lends plausibility to the claim that the Friendly Society reflects certain tenets of Wampanoag community lifeways. As a cross-cultural coalition based on economic, cultural, and spiritual practices, it certainly echoes many of the principles of the common pot that Brooks argues for in her work. She writes, “Inherent in the concept of the common pot is the idea that whatever was given from the larger network of inhabitants had to be shared within the human community. This ethic was not an altruistic ideal but a practice that was necessary to human survival” (3). This
is exactly the kind of approach Cuffe adopts in the Friendly Society’s model of communal relations in Africa. With its explicit focus on black-Native relations, my dissertation correlates with the work of Miles, who argues that the metaphor of the “common pot” can also be extended to cross-cultural interactions in early America (xvi). The common pot is the ideal representation to highlight how members of these communities staved off social starvation by nourishing one another with a sense of inclusive community membership.

(Re)creating Social Life in the Maritime Borderlands of the Circum-Atlantic

Following Miles’ argument, one of the major claims I make in this dissertation is that writing by Hammon, Equiano, and Cuffe exists at the intersection of the African diaspora and the experiences of Native Americans in North America and the Caribbean. Part of what makes this analysis unique is that I concentrate on black-Native relationships that occur in maritime contact zones in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Recent studies focus on seventeenth, nineteenth, or twentieth-century texts, and those that consider the eighteenth century tend to focus on land-locked zones of contact. For example, anthologies put forth in the last decade, including James F. Brooks’ important anthology, Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America (2002), Jonathan Brennen’s When Brer Rabbit Meets Coyote: African-Native American Literature (2003), and Miles’ Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country (2006), bring together a rich body of scholarship. However, few studies in these works consider the importance of maritime spaces in the eighteenth century. Similarly, a great deal of scholarship exists on cross-cultural encounters in New
Spain (from Florida to Mexico), but much of that work focuses on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Joseph Roach’s highly popular study, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996), which addresses black and Native intercultural movement along what he calls the “circum-Atlantic,” focuses mainly on the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. My study is perhaps most influenced by Jane Landers’ historical analysis of black and indigenous networks in the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico (“Atlantic Creoles”).

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, cross-cultural affiliations blossomed in liminal maritime contact zones such as port cities, slave plantations, and coastal tribal lands. They also evolved in ship holds, meetinghouses, schools, and places of worship. These spaces and places were important because they represent the locales where the disenfranchised intermingled, formed friendships, romances and marriages, provided hiding spaces, traded goods, circulated ideas, educated children, and hired one another.

With a focus on maritime encounters, my study builds on the work of what some have called New Atlantic Studies, which is comprised of several foundational works (Shapiro 22). Many seem to highlight Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* as a foundational

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19 See fn 10 above for more on Landers.
20 Throughout this dissertation, I rely on a definition of “space” that is interwoven with, but distinguished from “place.” Place can be defined as a particular (localized and temporal) location with some sense of boundary and topography. Space is a more theoretical concept associated with imaginary boundaries and commodities, such as land and the resources produced on that land. Both are commonly associated with studies of labor, although, as Arif Dirlik (building on the work of Henri Lefebvre) notes, “Space is product, the geographical equivalent of the commodity; place, on the other hand, is product and work, with the uniqueness of the work of art or the craft of the artisan” (18). In these definitions, labor (and the exploitation of that labor by capitalists and colonialists) and territory are closely connected. For the purposes of this study, I suggest that “space” also attends to the theoretical in-betweenness that echoes Mary Louise Pratt’s understanding of a “contact zone.”
text. Others include Roach’s *Cities of the Dead*, W. Jeffrey Bolster’s *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (1997), and the previously mentioned work of Linebaugh and Rediker in *The Many Headed Hydra*. In these and other interdisciplinary scholars working in these periods, oceanic spaces have come to represent liminal geographical contact zones that offer rich bodies of history-from-the-bottom up analysis. In these contact zones, marginalized agents sometimes contested the imperial circulation of ideas, goods and people. *The Many-Headed Hydra* traces the circulation of rebellion and revolution against English imperial hydrarchies carried across early modern, Western hemispheric waters and port cities by multi-ethnic crews of working-class men and women. This study has challenged scholars to consider the importance of maritime contact zones in early America as spaces and places where seamen and other proletarian workers circulated the Revolutionary spirit of the age.22

Despite the popularity of these foundational texts, they tend to overlook the presence of Native people as active agents in Atlantic contact zones. Native peoples in the eighteenth century were often at the forefront of circum-Atlantic participation,

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21 Criticizing scholarship that promoted an essentially white, nationalist paradigm of early European and American studies, Gilroy’s theoretical framework countered with a focus on African cultural hybridity. He promoted the slave ship as a circulatory symbol of Black intellectual modernity, freedom and movement that dialectically opposed the rigid stasis of chattel slavery for North American and Caribbean slaves and free blacks who were broadly unified by the omnipresent terror of enslavement around the Atlantic rim. Such scholarship has produced or critically analyzed key terms and theoretical models focused on maritime literatures of the “Black Atlantic,” “transatlantic,” “circum-Atlantic,” and “trans-oceanic.” Scholars working in the literary and historical periods often designated as Early American have used New Atlantic Studies to reexamine history, culture, politics and economics without privileging the rise of the nation-state as the primary agent of cultural production.

22 Similarly, Bolster critically reconfigures maritime history and Black Atlantic scholarship by closely documenting the participation of Black sailors in transatlantic cultures of commerce throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Challenging static notions of history that understand the Middle Passage as a one-way trip for enslaved Africans, he traces the multi-directional trajectories of free Black seamen as they navigated through harsh political and economic climates across the greater Atlantic world. In Bolster’s argument, eighteenth-century maritime spaces represent contact zones where black seamen developed cosmopolitan identities. As men who found national spaces to be racially inhospitable, these black sailors found solace in the mobility of the commercial ship.
especially in two of the three cases I examine. In light of these discussions, throughout this dissertation I use the terms “circum-Atlantic” and “circum-Caribbean” to describe spaces of contact. The main geographical spaces of analyses in my work include the tip of southern Florida, the Nicaraguan Coast, the southern New England coastline, and the African coastal colony of Sierra Leone. While the notion of transatlantic cultural exchange insists upon the back and forth traversing of the ocean, Roach argues for the concept of circum-Atlantic exchange to attend to the flow of people, goods, and culture along the perimeter of the Atlantic basin (4). In promoting the “circum-Atlantic,” he historically situates Indigenous and African peoples at the center of a larger oceanic “interculture” (4). The texts I examine gesture more toward circum-Atlantic cultures of exchange. Men like Paul Cuffe moved all along Atlantic coastal zones, rather than simply back and forth across the Atlantic.

In the title of this dissertation, I included the word “borderlands” to focus my analysis on what Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron argue were “the contested boundaries between colonial domains” with their own specific temporal and geographical particularities (814-815). As they outline, academic studies of borderlands must attend to “the variegated nature of European imperialism and of indigenous reactions to colonial encroachments” (814). They reject studies of borderlands that unnecessarily coalesce diverse groups into single elements, such as “Europeans,” “Africans” and “Indians,” which obfuscate the persistence of cross-cultural mixing and syncretic formations in these locations. Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zones,” as defined in Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992), represents an important key term in my focus on maritime borderlands. It attends to the “co-present,” “interactive,” and
“improvisational” spaces of interconnection among subjects (usually colonizers and colonized, or travelers and “travelees”) previously separated by geographical and historical dislocations (7). Contact zones are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (4). The significance of Pratt’s term materializes in how groups and subjects narrate descriptions of these two-way encounters, and what those descriptions tell us about how subjects were influenced, transformed or altered because of contact.  

Between 1760 and 1815, the spaces I examine were contested contact zones with complex histories of cross-cultural interaction. In the mid-eighteenth century, at the moment in which Hammon’s ship found itself lodged on a reef, the southern Florida coast was a place known for shipwreck, trade with Cuba, and Native coalition-building. It was also a space where some black men could find refuge from British slavery. Similarly, the Miskito Coast was known as a place where powerful groups of black and Native peoples intermingled and formed effective resistance to European colonization. In Sierra Leone at the turn of the century, Freetown was a contact zone based on its diverse population of Native Africans (including locals and repatriated slaves from other parts of

23 My dissertation recognizes that Pratt’s term participates in a larger historical conversation on the importance of frontiers, borders and borderlands. In the evolution of these theoretical concepts, many have relied on Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of “la frontera” in her book, Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987). Mary Pat Brady’s definition of “Border” in Keywords for American Cultural Studies acknowledges Anzaldúa’s writing as foundational for borderland scholarship. Anzaldúa’s analysis focuses on the sociopolitical and historical relations of the Mexico-Texas border, particularly land grabbing, violence, patriarchy, racism, and labor exploitation. Ultimately, her concept of “borders” is a spatial metaphor that rejects binary identity construction in favor of multiple identities and two-way exchanges. For many scholars, the value of this metaphor is the way it can be used to explore other borders and borderlands in literature, including gender, race, ethnicity, and sex.
the continent), Nova Scotian blacks, Jamaican Maroons, British authorities, and of course, unique men such as Cuffe.

The proliferation of black-Native affiliations in these texts warrants a closer study of these relational dynamics, the rise in cross-cultural networks, and their possible meanings for those subjects who relied on them for empowerment and survival. That so many of these connections occur in these texts is not a coincidence. I have constructed a timeline that focuses on specific cross-cultural relations in the midst of heightened competition for land, resources and cheap labor in the maritime spaces of New England, Florida and Central America between 1760 and 1815. In Chapter One, I begin with analysis of Briton Hammon’s *Narrative*, which was written and published during the Seven Year’s War. This war and its outcome represent a major shift in politics and economics for communities of color located on the North American continent and throughout the Atlantic. During this period, several major factors coalesced in the Atlantic world. Transatlantic slavery peaked in the Americas. Pseudo-scientific discourses began to shape political ideologies of race. National bodies took shape. Conflicts over tribal lands took on greater urgency as imperial and national powers sought control of land and resources. Meanwhile, religious revivalism spread as the First Great Awakening transformed communities of color throughout the Atlantic World. And of course, the Atlantic world saw the philosophical, political, and economic manifestations of liberalism and Revolutionary discourse spread throughout the circum-Atlantic basin.

During this period, European and United States’ colonial and imperial policies disrupted many African and Native communities. In the process, these vulnerable
communities confronted a variety of ideological, legal, and material factors that transformed their lands and lifestyles. Supporting this point, Joanna Brooks argues, “The racial and religious separatist impulse presented itself most dramatically during and after the War of Independence. The war caused significant disruption, dislocation, and resettlement for politically and economically vulnerable communities of color” (47). As a result, many communities were reconfigured. A part of this reorganization included a rise in contact among black and Native people and communities.

I conclude this study in 1815, which signals the end of the War of 1812. The War of 1812 centered on the U.S. and Great Britain’s conflicts over mercantile trading rights and territorial access. It was also a major point of national borderland enclosure for Native people throughout North America but particularly in the territorial United States. While transatlantic slavery ended in U.S. and Britain, southern U.S. states still practiced it illegally (a point that Cuffe angrily observes in his journal). For the most part, with regard to black and Native texts, after 1815, contact among groups of Black and Native peoples seems to occur less frequently in oceanic and coastal spaces and more regularly in frontier locations.

In Chapter One, I read Briton Hammon's so-called Florida Indian captivity narrative against historical accounts of Black-Native alliances in coastal Florida and Spanish Cuba. Placing Hammon’s narrative within the context of minority cultures operating in the liminal spaces of the circum-Caribbean suggests that Hammon was more likely rescued, rather than taken captive by Natives as most scholars have concluded. In this reading, the Calusa’s acceptance of Hammon temporarily recreates a sense of social life free from the debasement of New England slavery.
Chapter Two complicates Olaudah Equiano’s descriptions of his religious missionary work among the mixed-race Miskitu people of Central America. Regarding this important but often overlooked scene in his autobiography, I argue that he frames a alliance with the Miskitu as an intersubjective bond forged between racialized others seeking to remain human in a world that rarely recognized them as such. He bases the terms of this bond on his devotion to Methodism, which he characterizes as a spiritual commitment to human fellowship. However, as his depiction of the scene reveals, Methodism obstructs Equiano’s ability to fully forge a more permanent connection to the Miskitu. Their resistance to his evangelism, and his continued devotion to his beliefs, mark the downfall of their alliance.

Chapter Three brings together spirituality and economics in the early nineteenth-century circum-Atlantic by examining Black-Native relations in the British colony of Sierra Leone. Reading the logbook and letters from the black-Native mariner Paul Cuffe, I examine Cuffe’s creation of the Friendly Society of Sierra Leone, a cross-cultural trading group. To combat racialized and systematic forms of capitalism in the colony, Cuffe characterizes the Society as an intersubjective spiritual coalition of cross-cultural, African settlers. Because the colonial government’s collusion with British trading firms had left the settlers politically and economically marginalized, he proposes an alternative form of liberal trade that abstracts subjectivity to the group, rather than individuals. He believes that a Quaker-inspired Christian benevolence, characterized as an intersubjective bond among members, can liberate them from their plight. In constructing his coalition, Cuffe disassociates native Africans from his plan, suggesting that they occupy a subordinated place in a religious hierarchy of African subjects.
By choosing three different texts with three different types of authors, I look at the possibilities and limits of cross-cultural intersubjective from a variety of vantage points. The chapter on Briton Hammon’s *Narrative* examines the limits of intersubjectivity in the context of war, captivity, and the imperial competition for Native lands and resources. Hammon is a liminal figure who stumbles into his alliance with the Calusa and who narrates very few details regarding his experiences among them. In contrast with Equiano and Cuffe, Hammon possessed very little power while he was living among the Calusa. While a welcome guest, there is little evidence to suggest that he clearly experienced a two-way reciprocal exchange of intersubjectivity with them. His return to slavery limited his ability to freely tell his story and to highlight any potentially positive aspects of his alliance with the Calusa. Unlike Equiano and Cuffe, Hammon dictated his story to an amanuensis. Details of his story were mediated by the political biases and publishing agendas of the publishers, who were close political allies with Hammon’s master, General John Winslow. In contrast to Hammon’s *Narrative*, Equiano’s portrayal of the Miskitu offers a closer look at the positive and negative dimensions of Christian evangelism and alliance building. Because he was a free man who willingly signed on to a colonization mission to the Miskito Coast, he enjoyed more freedom to choose the terms of his relationship with the Miskitu. As an author, he possessed more autonomy than did Hammon with regard to authorial voice in the publication of his narrative. Paul Cuffe’s writings allow for an analysis of economics and religion at a moment when black writers were articulating the injustices of racial capitalism linked to national citizenship. Cuffe had amassed quite a bit of wealth and
power before he shipped off to Sierra Leone. This wealth allowed him to pursue his coalition with the Friendly Society and to dictate the terms of the agreement.
Chapter One

Briton Hammon and the Calusa Indians on Cape Florida

The presence of Africans and their descendants residing among Native American peoples was sufficiently evident, albeit rare, to drive these historians and ethnographers toward archives and field sites in the hope of recovering moments of alliance between these victims of Euro-American expansion.

-James F. Brooks

*I think I have not deviated from Truth, in any particular of this my Narrative, and tho’ I have omitted a great many Things...*

-Briton Hammon

*They us’d me pretty well.*

-Briton Hammon

The opening scene of Briton Hammon’s *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man* (1760) appears to describe yet another stereotypical eighteenth-century tale of Indian savagery and captivity.

According to the text, a ship carrying the narrator is returning home to Massachusetts in late spring of 1748 with a cargo of logwood when it lodges on a shallow reef off the southern Florida coast. As the captain and crew debate whether to ditch the expensive cargo to lift the ship off the reef, a group of unidentified local Natives launch a marine assault on the crew in a surprise attack that leaves nearly everyone dead. Hammon is the

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24 This quotation can be found in Brooks 5.
25 The full title of the text is *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man,--Servant to General Winslow, of Marshfield, in New-England; Who Returned to Boston, After Having Been Absent Almost Thirteen Years. Containing an Account of the Many Hardships He Underwent from the Time He Left His Master's House, in the Year 1747, to the Time of His Return to Boston.--How He Was Cast Away in the Capes of Florida;---The Horrid Cruelty and Inhuman Barbarity of the Indians in Murdering the Whole Ship's Crew;---The Manner of His Being Carry'd by Them Into Captivity. Also, an Account of His Being Confin'd Four Years and Seven Months in a Close Dungeon,--and the Remarkable Manner in Which He Met with His Good Old Master in London; Who Returned to New-England, a Passenger in the Same Ship.*
26 Probably the Florida Keys, islands located south of present-day Miami.
lone survivor of the ship, and as these “inhuman savages” bring him ashore, they declare their intentions “to roast [him] alive” (21). However, instead of experiencing cannibalism or torture during his five-week stay, Hammon is surprised to discover that he is “us’d well,” as his “captors” share “boil’d corn” with him, which was often what they ate themselves” (22). Eventually they let him “escape” without confrontation by allowing him to board a passing Spanish trading vessel without recompense (22). Of the recent scholarship that has addressed this scene, most seem to agree that it represents a rather straightforward episode of captivity, and that this is how it would have been understood in the historical moment of his publication (Foster 42; Sekora “Red, White, and Black” 94; Bolster 9; Weyler 42). However, when taken together, these somewhat contradictory details invite speculation as to whether Hammon was ever really taken captive in the first place. This speculation is based on changing perspectives in how we read this text. Certainly, from the perspective of a British reading audience in 1760, Hammon appears to be a free British subject captivated by “savage” Natives who are predisposed to unwarranted violence. However, from the vantage point of a black man enslaved by British subjects (and presumably under the watchful care of his captain), the

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27 Hammon’s *Narrative* was not published in multiple editions. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be citing the version included in Vincent Carretta’s anthology of eighteenth-century black writing, *Unchained Voices* (1996). This is a popularly accepted version of his text. For other texts in this analysis, including David George’s *An Account of the Life of Mr. David George, from Sierra Leone in Africa* (1793-1797), and John Marrant’s *A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings With John Marrant, a Black* (1785), I will also rely on Carretta’s anthology.  
28 For those such as Foster and Sekora, this debate spills over into the question of whether Hammon’s Indian captivity places his *Narrative* as a precursor to the nineteenth-century slave narrative. It should be noted that for authors such as Sekora, whether Hammon was captivated by Natives is a precursor to a larger argument surrounding the multiple forms of captivity that men like Hammon were subjected to in these texts. So much of how we interpret Hammon’s presence in his account is based upon how we interpret the ambiguities regarding his labor status. For a thorough overview on this question, see Weyler 51 fn11.
attack and Hammon’s subsequent survival, during which time he is “us’d well,” looks like something else entirely.

In this chapter I argue that instead of being *captured* by bloodthirsty savages, Hammon may have been *rescued* by Natives sympathetic to the plight of African slaves. I have unearthed archival documentation suggesting that Hammon was General John Winslow’s slave (both before the trip described above, and later, when he returns to Massachusetts and published this *Narrative*). I challenge scholarship that interprets the ambiguous language of the extended subtitle to mean that Hammon was Winslow’s free black servant and that his participation on the voyage was of his own volition (Carretta 24; Sekora “Briton Hammon” 133; Bolster 8). That Winslow enslaved Hammon is essential for my second argument, which involves the unnamed Natives in this scene. Based on the work of scholars most familiar with Floridian Native peoples in this period, I assert that these Natives were most likely the Calusa Indians, or a collection of Natives closely affiliated with the Calusa (Hann; Marquardt; Milanich; Worth). Before and after European contact, the Calusa were a powerful tribe of skilled boatmen with political influence across the region. By 1748 they had become a small and fragile group comprised of many Native groups across the southern peninsula because of disease, war, impressment and slavery. In making these claims, I incorporate historical and literary studies showing precedent for Black-Native alliances along the Florida coast. The Calusa may have rescued Hammon because they perceived him to be a victim of British slave traffickers who had historically captured and enslaved the Calusa as well.

In developing this argument, I begin with a close analysis of Hammon’s status as Winslow’s enslaved property. Archival research indicates Hammon was Winslow’s
slave and bears weight on how we understand not only the content in this text, but also Hammon’s authority as author and narrator of his *Narrative*. Hammon’s status as a slave leads to a second major claim in this project, which is that Hammon’s enslavement in Massachusetts must begin with a discussion of social isolation among one of the British colony’s elite families. Using the research of Africa diaspora scholars writing about slavery and social death, I argue that Hammon’s five-week stay in Florida may have been a temporary, cross-cultural alliance that promoted his subjectivity, if only for a brief moment. To develop this point, in the final section I turn to the work of Saidiya Hartman, who argues for the importance of “networks of affiliation” in slave communities (59). For Hartman, networks of affiliation can be understood as instances of connection forged in the violent context of a slave’s total abjection (59). In adopting this approach to Hammon’s *Narrative*, my project takes up the challenge proposed by Tiya Miles. She asks: “What political issues, strategies, and conflicts emerged out of their shared experience; and what creative works and cultural productions were inspired by their coming together?” (“Introduction” 3). In contrast to popular studies of Hammon’s text, which tend to interpret this episode as representative of the Indian captivity genre, I use Miles’ question to offer an alternative reading of the *Narrative*. Arguing for Hammon’s cross-cultural alliance with the Calusa suggests that this text belongs to a genre of early black-Native cultural productions. The mid-eighteenth century was a time when minority cross-cultural encounters in maritime contact zones along the circum-Atlantic could be fluid, dynamic, and provide an empowering sense of personhood for subjected slaves such as Hammon.
Hammon’s Captivity Among Plymouth’s Elite

Conclusive facts regarding Briton Hammon’s life continue to elude those interested in the intimate biographical details of his life. The missing details concern Hammon’s ambiguous status as a man of color living and working in the home of a prominent New England family with ties to the Mayflower. The missing data obscures Hammon’s experiences of social death. As Vincent Carretta has demonstrated with his research on Olaudah Equiano’s birthplace, the stakes are high when it comes to establishing the essential details of a slave’s biography (“Autobiography”). The ambiguity over Hammon’s status as slave or servant has remained unresolved since his text was re-introduced to the field by Dorothy Porter in her important anthology, *Early Negro Writing: 1760-1837* (1971). In Hammon’s case, we know that he briefly entered the public stage because of a written text, only to be reclaimed by the objectivity and anonymity of a slave’s life. In fact, outside of the inclusion of “a Negro man—servant to General Winslow, of Marshfield, in New-England” included in the subtitle, the striking absence of explicit racial commentary in the *Narrative* makes it highly possible that the first autobiography authored by a Black man in North America could have been lost to researchers (20). Nevertheless, despite this racial designation, his class status has remained in doubt. The extended version of his title identifies Winslow as his “good old master” (20). Other than these minor details, contemporary readers have been left to speculate – was Briton Hammon a servant or a slave to Winslow?

Historical uses of the two terms render it difficult to ascertain whether Hammon was a slave or servant, as these two terms were used interchangeably in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries among New England slaveholders (Kawashima 404, Melish 85-118;
Demos). Adding to this difficulty, while very few records of any kind have surfaced regarding Hammon’s life, those that researchers have found continued to use the term “servant” to classify his status. In this regard, Carretta’s anthology of Black-Atlantic texts includes several valuable footnotes. He writes that the term “master” is “apparently used here in the sense of employer rather than owner. Hammon thus seems to have been a free man” (24). In contrast, John Sekora assumes that Hammon was a slave and that his work is “the earliest slave narrative” (“Briton Hammon” 143). Robert Desrochers found a revelatory marriage record in *Plymouth Church Records 1620-1859* indicating that, on June 3, 1762, nearly two years to the day after he returned to Massachusetts, “Britain (sic) Negro Servt of Genl Winslow” married “Hannah, Servt of Mr. Hovey” in Plymouth’s First Church (*Plymouth* 493). This vital record lists both Hammon and his wife as servants to their respective masters. This usage fits with other documentation including the *Vital Records of Marshfield, MA to the Year 1850*, which simply records the marriage without classification at all: “Briton Hamon (sic) of this town & Hannah Hovey of Plymouth” (179). These genealogical records seem to imply that Hammon was indeed a free servant.

However, newly uncovered records suggest otherwise. *Vital Records of Plymouth, MA to the Year 1850* similarly records “Marriage Intentions” and lists the following entry on December 26, 1761, “A Purpose of Marriage, Between, Brittain Hammond (sic) Negro manslave, to John Winslow Esqr of Marshfield; And Hannah, Negro Woman Slave, to James Hovey, Esqr of Plymouth” (251). Cross checking this

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29 Hovey was a noted barrister in Plymouth who had collaborated with Winslow’s brother, Edward, and the record suggests Hammon and Hannah were somehow linked through Winslow family relations.
exceptional entry against other available sources led to a different text—*The Mayflower Descendant: A Quarterly Magazine of Pilgrim Genealogy and History* (Bowman). In issue 26:1, published in 1924, the exact same marriage intention is recorded, word for word, again listing Hammon as “manslave” and his wife-to-be Hannah as a “womanslave” (Bowman 41). According to these two documents, Hammon was, in fact, Winslow’s slave.

How should we interpret these conflicting documents? Why is there a discrepancy? Do these disparate classifications reflect the whims and racial ideologies of two different recording clerks in Plymouth in the 1760s? Does the use of “servant” in the former records indicate a racially self-conscious archivist who attempted to euphemize Hammon’s slave status? If we accept that Hammon was a slave, then this potential whitewashing represents the power of the archivist as author. This editor manipulated vital statistics data in order to distort the relationship between Hammon, Hannah and their slave masters. On the other hand, if we believe that Hammon was actually a free man of color, then why would someone recording marriage intentions list him as a “manslave”? As New England slave historian Joanne Pope Melish argues, there were few men of color who worked as free wage laborers or as indentured servants in this era, leaving us to conclude that Hammon was more likely to be a slave and less likely to be a free wage laborer. She writes, “Until the 1780s the great majority of people of African descent were slaves in fact, formally classified as items of property; free Africans were rare, anomalous cases” (76).

Other research points to the fact that because multiple generations of the Winslow family owned slaves and indentured servants, there is context for perceiving Hammon as
a slave. According to Karin Goldstein, multiple generations of the family owned slaves, including John Winslow’s wife, brother, father, and grand-uncle (317-327).\(^{30}\) As most of Winslow’s relatives owned slaves, Hammon was connected to a much larger network of slave relations when he traveled from Marshfield to Plymouth and Boston on errands for John. This network probably explains how he met his wife, Hannah, upon his return to Marshfield. However, this research also reveals that African slaves and local Natives were intermixing within and around Winslow households for several generations. Like many prominent colonial families across the region, the Winslow family also owned Native indentured servants who worked as domestics. Goldstein’s insightful archival research on the Winslow family’s servants and slaves has uncovered that during the middle of the eighteenth century, Winslow owned a Wampanoag woman named Nab Nowitt (322).\(^{31}\) Whether Nowitt was a part of the Winslow household during both of

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\(^{30}\) John Winslow’s great-grandfather Edward Winslow, is known best as the Pilgrim diplomat who worked closely with Squanto to negotiate delicate peace treaties with Massasoit, sachem of the Wampanoags. While Edward never owned African slaves, he was the only passenger on the Mayflower to bring English indentured servants with him (Krusell 12). According to Winslow historian Cynthia Hagar Krusell, “It was a mark of Winslow’s wealth and unusual for Plymouth Colony that he maintained servants on his Plymouth and Marshfield estates” (12). At Careswell (the name given to the family estate in Marshfield) the servants “supped” apart from the family as was the custom in the medieval manor houses of England” (12). In addition, Edward’s brother John (General John Winslow’s great uncle) was an active investor in the early triangular trade between 1650-73 while living in Boston and owned at least one female African slave named Jane (317). Among members of his immediate family his father, Judge Isaac Winslow, owned several indentured servants and African slaves. Demonstrating the legalized, objectified status of servants and slaves among New England families in this era, Isaac’s probate inventory in 1738 lists “servants” valued at “£ 250” alongside other material items including livestock, farm equipment, furniture, clothes, dishware, and books (319). Both Goldstein and Winslow historian Cynthia Hagar Krusell unearthed research confirming that John Winslow’s wife, Mary Little, was born into a family that owned slaves for multiple generations. In her father Isaac’s will, he bequeathed to Mary a female slave named Belah (322). Belah would have become Winslow’s property upon marriage to Mary and it is likely she lived with and knew Hammon. Goldstein notes that Winslow is listed in the 1754 Massachusetts Slave Census as having one “female servant for life” (322). Records also indicate that Winslow also owned a Black slave named Cato who would have been a part of the homestead in Marshfield when Hammon returned in 1760 (330). Winslow’s brother Edward, who lived in Plymouth and worked in the legal system, owned at least one female slave named Esther, as well as her enslaved children, Philip and Eunice.

\(^{31}\) According to the diary of his great-granddaughter, Anna Green Winslow, Nowitt died of some unidentified illness in the Winslow house in 1773. Reflecting on her visit to see relatives in Marshfield,
Hammon’s terms in the house is hard to say, but her presence as Winslow’s indentured servant is a reminder that after King Philip’s War, colonial court authorities often forced Natives into contracts of involuntary servitude to pay off outstanding debts (Silverman 197-224). Ironically, this history reveals that Hammon was probably networking among New England Natives for most of his life before ever setting foot on Florida soil.\footnote{32}

Hammon’s experience of New England enslavement represents an ironic play on captivity in his \textit{Narrative}—while the text suggests he was an Indian captive for five weeks in Florida, the archive suggests he was held captive, along with other men and women of African and Native descent, for his entire life among Plymouth’s elite.

Readers should not perceive the \textit{Narrative}’s euphemistic use of the phrase “servant to General Winslow” as an innocent exchange of equally weighted terms. In attempting to subdue Hammon’s own captivity in Plymouth, these genealogical records demonstrate a self-consciousness with regard to African slavery in Massachusetts. In this case, those editing the archive appear to recognize, and even mitigate the idea that elite families in Plymouth were historic participants in their own version of African and Native captivity.

\footnote{32} The history of this mixing, which includes histories of African and Native servitude, is part of a larger history of Native captivity and enslavement in New England. This history entangles John Winslow’s ancestors within a larger circum-Atlantic web of Native captivity and slavery. The Winslow family history includes examples of dubious land acquisitions, as well as the selling of Wampanoag prisoners of war into slavery in the West Indies. In 1671, Josiah Winslow, John’s grandfather, followed an increasingly common practice of using legal means to settle debts with local sachems when such lands were not intended to be given to colonists. According to Silverman, Plymouth colonist Josiah filed suit in Plymouth court against William, the son of Assawompset sachem Tispaquin, over the debt of one horse. When the court awarded Josiah a verdict of approximately four times the value of the horse, William had no choice but to cede valuable land to pay off the debt. When Metacom (Philip) declared grievances to the colonial government preceding the outbreak of war, such tactics were part of his complaints (100). Several years later, when Josiah became the Governor and commander in chief of the colonial forces in 1675 and 1676, he wrote and signed the documents that sent 180 captured Wampanoag prisoners into slavery in the West Indies (Lepore).
However, as Hammon sat down to write or share his story with Green and Russell, he was certainly aware of his own lived experiences of these inconsistencies.

Just as biographical questions swirl around Hammon’s life, so do authorship questions hover over the writing and printing of his Narrative. These questions bear weight on how we interpret his experiences in Florida. In his analysis of Hammon’s authorship, Daniel Vollaro argues that certain details in the text, such as the number of Indians who attacked the ship, were borrowed from other New England captivity narratives of the eighteenth century (140). In Vollaro’s reading, Hammon is a fully authoritative author who exercises complete control over the content of his Narrative. This leads Vollaro to conclude that Hammon is an “unreliable witness to history” (133).

In contrast, I agree with critics who have argued Hammon probably did not possess complete authority over the final printed product of his story (Andrews; Zafar; Sekora “Red, White, and Black”; Weyler). Although there is no way of knowing for certain, it is likely that Hammon dictated his story to an amanuensis and that the final product went through an editorial process that may have distorted Hammon’s original version of events. Sekora’s research on captivity narratives published by Green and Russell, the publishers of Hammon’s Narrative, and their close colleagues, Fowle and Draper, suggests that Hammon’s Narrative borrowed wording from other similarly conceived captivity narratives of the era in its title, as well as in its opening and closing lines (Sekora “Red, White, and Black” 97-98). While it seems likely that his account was edited, we do not know exactly how the editor or editors took liberties with Hammon’s diction, style, tone, vocabulary, or version of events. There is no way to know whether Hammon wrote, by hand, his own version of events and then handed his story to the
publishers, or whether he sat in their offices on Queen Street and dictated it out of memory.

These vexing questions of authority are perhaps most related to the fact that Hammon was an author who was the captured property of those who represented the anticipated reading audience of his *Narrative*. Those who had enslaved him, maintained surveillance over him, and rendered him an unautonomous subject, would also read his story. Saidiya Hartman’s analysis of the subjugation of the enslaved reminds us that Hammon would have been distinctly aware of this relationship in choosing which words to include in his account, and which ones to leave out. Her arguments suggest that when it comes to Hammon as author, these are the “direct and simple forms of domination, the brutal asymmetry of power, the regular exercise of violence, and the denial of liberty that make it difficult, if not impossible, to direct one’s own conduct” (55). In consideration of Hartman’s point, analysis of Hammon’s authority as author must attend to the severe restraints placed upon him regarding what he could and could not say about his experiences. Recognizing that Winslow, Winslow’s family members, and other pro-Christian, pro-English readers would be perusing the pages of the text, Hammon needed to be immensely careful in how he talked about the so-called “villains” in his adventures, namely the Natives, Spanish political officials, and Catholics that he encountered in his travels. Ultimately, because of his own marginalized status upon his return to New England, it is necessary to speculate whether Hammon preferred to publicly share his story in print, or whether Winslow ordered him to do so.

The likelihood of an amanuensis provides one explanation for why the structure of Hammon’s *Narrative* seems to fit the captivity genre more so than the eighteenth
century slave narrative and other black autobiographies from this era. The opening lines make this point apparent, for Hammon’s *Narrative* does not map his community and kinship networks or his cultural origins. As I argued in the introduction to this dissertation, many of the texts of the eighteenth century used the form of the autobiography to chart relational networks to which the author belonged. In doing so, these texts discursively recreated social communities that were destroyed by captivity and enslavement. These texts attempted to regenerate an author’s subjectivity as one based on connection to actual human relationships, especially those that previously recognized the author’s subjectivity. The fact that Hammon’s text does not follow a similar form suggests an amanuensis wrote this text and imposed other conventional forms on the story, such as framing his account as a captivity narrative. In making this claim, I do not mean to suggest that all texts written by white editors were subject to this kind of textual intervention. However, it does offer one explanation for why Hammon’s *Narrative* fails to outline some of the networks to which he belonged. For scholars looking to better understand the biographical details of Hammon, these absences have been a source of frustration. While the text fails to provide concrete details about where Hammon was born, it also fails to offer details surrounding his family, friends, and cultural heritage. The only relational links provided involve Hammon’s subordinate status to Winslow, “His Good Master,” who legally recognizes Hammon as chattel. In other words, the exclusion of Hammon’s relational networks and the inclusion of his bondage to Winslow represent a kind of literary erasure of Hammon’s own relational subjectivity. Readers wanting to know about the people and relationships that granted Briton Hammon a sense of personhood are left with few answers and many questions.
Ambiguities pertaining to authorship and his relational networks have a direct bearing on how critics interpret the critical scenes in Hammon’s *Narrative*, especially his experiences in Florida. As stated in the introduction, most seem to agree that the *Narrative* fits the captivity genre due to its representations of Native peoples (Foster 42; Sekora “Red, White, and Black” 94; Bolster 9; Weyler 42). Weyler observes that despite recording instances of kindness on the part of Indian captors, most captivity narratives point out the innate savagery and violent nature of indigenous peoples, and Hammon’s text fits the genre in this way (42). The extended title characterizes the attack on Hammon’s ship as the “horrid Cruelty and inhuman Barbarity of the Indians” (20). Later, the text reveals that he would rather drown than “be kill’d by those barbarous and inhuman Savages” (21). Do we believe these are Hammon’s words, or those of an editor with a political agenda as well as a racial and religious bias against Native people? If we can assume that Green and Russell were probably responsible for writing the extended title, then it seems plausible to suggest that similar wording located within the body of the *Narrative* may also have been the work of the editors as well. The fact that the text was published in the middle of the Seven Year’s War (1756-63) also provides essential context for negative anti-Native sentiments offered in these characterizations. Political context of the era combined with the political leanings of the editors suggests the possibility that representations of Native savagery, as well as Hammon’s captivity, are more the work of the pro-Christian, pro-English editors than Hammon himself.

This does not mean that in his recreation of events, Hammon was completely and totally subjected. As Rafia Zafar has argued, “Domination by the white editor, no matter how significant, can never be complete. Whether or not the black narrators or their white
editors meant to do so, the inclusion of slaves within American captivity narratives marked an inroad into and adaptation of white literary and popular culture” (54). Zafar’s insights influence a reading of Hammon’s text, suggesting he may have chosen to remain silent about certain details in his text that would not have been seen as favorable by this audience. She elaborates on this point, “The facts selected by the black tellers may be suspect, for the same reason that a slave’s smiling face and tuneful whistle did not necessarily indicate happiness, simple-mindedness, or unconcern” (54). Despite his status, Hammon still possessed some control over what he wanted to write or say and what not to say about his story.

Unsurprisingly, the text suggests Hammon may have done just that. Toward the end of the Narrative, readers find a “surprising” revelation that Hammon may have intentionally withheld important facts, details, events, and his personal feelings about them, as he dictated his tale to his editor:

I think I have not deviated from Truth, in any particular of this my Narrative, and tho' I have omitted a great many Things, yet what is wrote may suffice to convince the Reader, that I have been most grievously afflicted, and yet thro' the Divine Goodness, as miraculously preserved, and delivered out of many Dangers; of which I desire to retain a grateful Remembrance, as long as I live in the World. (24)

The Narrative’s admission that Hammon has “omitted a great many Things” is a critical revelation. Where are these omissions and what information was withheld? Could they be read as Hammon’s sly acknowledgment to certain readers that he intentionally withheld key details that would not have pleased Winslow, Green and Russell and the anticipated pro-colonial English readership? Through this lens, the revelation that Hammon as “been most grievously afflicted” raises additional questions about the many
forms of suffering he has encountered in his *Narrative*. Pro-colonial English readers might be led to believe that savage Indians and Catholic Spaniards are responsible for Hammon’s pain. However, from his vantage point, perhaps he has “omitted” the “afflictions” suffered at the hands of his slave Master and the colonial system that has removed him from his networks of affiliation in order to transform him into chattel.

Perhaps Hammon intentionally silenced himself. This approach to his story resembles what Patricia Laurence would describe as acts of resistance found in the self-silencing of female authors. For Laurence, literary silences are not merely signs of consent or complicity with dominant ideologies or oppressive institutions. Rather, they are active expressions of voice and “presence” (157). Such silences circumvent socially dangerous or unconventional ideas or expressions, and remain, like “a text, waiting to be read” (157-158). When pairing Laurence’s rereading of female novelists with Hammon’s admission of intentional omission, we may read his silences as *active insertions* into his story. As we will see in an upcoming section of this chapter, how could he adequately explain to a pro-British reading audience that he may have found sanctuary from British slavery within a community of so-called savage heathens in Florida?

Just as critics have debated Hammon’s access to agency and autonomy, so too have they speculated on just how he ended up on a Plymouth sloop bound for the Caribbean in 1747. What is missing from this analysis is historical context pertaining to a form of brutal captivity feared by white and Black sailors alike in this era—naval impressment. As context demonstrates, Hammon’s presence on a ship bound for the Caribbean was based on his enslavement—he had to do what his master commanded.
The *Narrative* maintains that it was his “intention” to head to sea, and scholars have taken this to be accurate, but the archive suggests something else entirely.

According to the text, “ON Monday, 25th Day of December, 1747, with the leave of my Master, I went from *Marshfield*, with an Intention to go a Voyage to Sea, and the next Day, the 26th, got to *Plymouth*, where I immediately ship'd myself on board of a Sloop, Capt. *John Howland*, Master, bound to *Jamaica* and the *Bay*” (20). Picking up on the text’s use of the word “intention” W. Jeffrey Bolster speculates that Hammon possessed some type of agency in choosing to head to sea. He explains, “Prompted by memories of luxuriant Jamaican alternatives to sleety nor’easters, he negotiated the right for a voyage when his master Winslow’s frozen fields were untillable, and earned a brief sojourn in the black tropics—the productive heartland of the Anglo-American plantation system. Winslow, of course, pocketed most of the wages” (7-8). Bolster’s analysis of Hammon positions him as a liminal figure—a slave who was able to “negotiate” his place on Howland’s ship. However, as personal correspondence between Winslow brothers reveals, Hammon probably lacked much agency, “intention,” or ability to negotiate when it came to his presence on the sloop. In fact, he would have probably never been a crewmember at all had it not been for an uprising of Bostonian maritime workers just thirty miles north of Plymouth who were rebelling against their own experiences of unjust captivity—British naval impressment.

Newly uncovered research offers a clearer picture of how Hammon ended up on his ship. On November 19, 1747, Edward Winslow sat down in his office in Plymouth and composed an anxious letter to his brother, Captain John Winslow (Hammon’s
master) in Boston (“Letter”). John, a native of nearby Marshfield, was in Boston serving as Plymouth’s representative to the colonial government. Edward was concerned with the recent events in Boston that had maritime workers and political leaders around the Atlantic buzzing. On November 17th, a mob of three hundred to several thousand unruly sailors rebelled against the press gangs sent by British Commander Charles Knowles. Thomas Hutchinson described the event as “a tumult in the Town of Boston equal to any which had preceded it” (qtd. in Linebaugh and Rediker 215). The riots were the culmination of years of impressments up and down the Atlantic seaboard. They ended with Governor William Shirley in hiding and sailors burning a barge on the town common. Despite the tumult, fears of press gangs had a ripple effect throughout New England port cities. As a result, local sailors, particularly from Hammon’s hometown of Plymouth, wanted nothing to do with sailing to Boston. Naval impressment among the British navy was a form of captivity unwelcome to those sailors who valued just compensation for their labor, as well as respect for their health and safety.

Edward was worried that his wife’s cousin, Captain John Howland, would not find enough able seamen to sail his sloop north to Boston before heading south to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. He writes, “I fear Capt. Howland will meet with difficulty in getting hands to bring up the sloop, as I cannot prevail with those that are here to go to Boston for fear of the press” (Winslow). As a remedy to this dilemma, Edward proposed Briton to work as an extra sailor, and the letter requested permission to do so. He writes, “I wrote him to mention it to you to let Briton come in her, not

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33 The source of the following information comes from a letter from Edward Winslow to John Winslow, Hammon’s “Master.” To my knowledge, this is the first time this letter has made its way into analysis of Hammon’s text.
knowing but she may be ready to come at the time it would suit for Briton to come and it will be easier for him than to foot it, however I knew there could be no damage in proposing it” (Winslow). From this letter we learn that Hammon’s trip was not the result of a personal desire to work aboard a ship or even to flee the cold New England winters. Although the letter does not refer to Hammon as either servant or slave, it does emphasize that the Winslows controlled Hammon’s actions. Being a slave, he was in no position to resist the Winslow’s needs. Hammon was going to help fill the crew by working onboard Howland’s ship. Whether John ever replied is not known, but he must have authorized Edward’s plan, for on December 25th, Briton Hammon said goodbye to his friends and loved ones, walked ten miles south to Plymouth and stepped aboard Howland’s sloop. While other sailors were fortunate to resist Knowles’ impressment, as Winslow’s personal slave, Hammon was subject to his own local version of it.

The family and business connections between the Winslow brothers and Captain John Howland reveal the subtle but important ways that Briton Hammon was a man caught in the interconnected web of transatlantic capital and labor. Due to the shortage of able-bodied sailors willing to risk the press gangs in Boston, his maritime skills were now more valuable to the Winslows than ever. Howland’s ship was due to import the highly valuable Campeche logwood on its West Indies voyage. In the bourgeois New England world of 1747, elites like the Winslows invested in the importing of resources from all over the globe, as well as the ships and men that would transport these goods. Campeche logwood was a highly desired product in European colonies. It was a valuable source of dye used in the manufacturing of textiles. Boston vessels were known to transport hundreds of tons of Logwood from Campeche each year, where it would be sent to other major ports around the globe.

In addition, while we do not know if the Winslows were principal investors in the logwood, it seems possible that they could have been. As Edward’s letter reveals, they were desperate to outfit the crew of the ship. Sending their valued slave was a risky but necessary move. This detail is important for two reasons. First, the quest for tropically based resources inspired the trip and sets in motion the events that lead to Hammon’s Narrative. Second, the reason the crew became stuck on the Cape Florida reef is that Howland refused to dump his cargo. As Hammon relates, “The Captain was advised, intreated, and beg’d on, by every Person on board, to heave over but only 20 Ton of the Wood, and we should get clear, which if he had done, might have sav’d his Vessel and Cargo, and not only so, but his own Life, as well as the Lives of the Mate and Nine Hands, as I shall presently relate” (20-21). The Knowles Riots, the family connection to Captain Howland and value of logwood coalesce in and around Briton Hammon, setting in motion events that conclude with him being the lone survivor of the ship.
Rescuing Briton Hammon from Captivity

Hammon’s status as enslaved property and the provocative “omissions” withheld from his *Narrative* work together to complicate the scene that many have described as Indian captivity. A close reading of this scene suggests that after shipwreck, the Calusa may have been rescuing what they perceived to be an enslaved black man, rather than capturing free black British property. Instead of being captured by “barbarous and inhuman Savages,” Hammon was brought ashore by coastal Natives seeking to remain sovereign and resist British imperialism. This agenda was rooted in the context of the historical moment. My analysis in this section provides an important look into cross-cultural reciprocal exchanges between Floridian Native people, European imperialists and marooned black subjects in circum-Atlantic contact zones.

Coastal natives with maritime skill and diplomatic political and economic ties to the Spanish Crown in Havana accurately describe several Floridian indigenous groups at the time, but particularly the Calusa. According to historian Jerald Milanich, the Calusa were probably the largest and most powerful and influential native group in pre-Columbian southern Florida (38). Primarily, they were skilled fishermen and aggressive warriors who maintained a powerful authority over other native tribes in the southern peninsula of Florida. Among archeological and historical scholars, they are probably best known for their early resistance to Spanish imperialism and for their historical salvaging of wrecked ships on the Florida Keys (Milanich 40-44). Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries the Calusa increasingly participated in European mercantile trade, particularly with the Spanish in Cuba. The Spanish attempted throughout the centuries to convert the Calusa to Christianity. The Calusa may have used this tactic to their
advantage, often promising to allow missionaries to practice in the region in exchange for military protection and commercial trade options. It is known that they also relied on Spanish ships for seasonal tribal migration along the coast. By the mid-seventeenth century, they had become adept at using their longstanding political alliances with Spain in exchange for protection from English slave traders and English Native allies, such as the Yamasee and the Creeks.

The first and most basic question involves the Calusa attack on Hammon’s ship. Why did the Calusa seemingly possess such strong anti-English sentiment? Hammon’s text characterizes the reasons for this attack as largely a result of their “barbarous and inhuman” behavior. From this perspective, the origin of the conflict is rooted in native savagery. According to this version of events, civilized English innocence is threatened by unpredictable Native proclivities toward unprovoked violence. However, what story emerges if we position Hammon’s sloop within a larger historical context of British captivity and enslavement of Native groups throughout the Southeast?

Native fears of enslavement provide at least one substantial reason explaining the Calusa surprise attack on Hammon’s English ship in 1748. Analysis of English slave practices in the southeast region of the continent suggest that the Calusa had grave reasons to fear English ships sailing along the coast. By the mid-eighteenth century, when Hammon’s sloop struck a reef, the region from the southern tip of Florida to Georgia and the Carolinas was becoming an increasingly contested space among Spanish missionaries, English slaveholders, shipping companies on both sides, and scores of Indian tribes with divided loyalties. Historian Amy Turner Bushnell argues that throughout this region:
Native hatred of the English ran deep. The real cause was that the English treated the wild coast like a labor pool, seizing the natives at will and taking them to distant places where they were forced to labor under dangerous conditions that few would survive. (56)

British attacks on Native settlements were a real threat to Native sovereignty at this time, and those groups and tribes that did not politically ally with the British were vulnerable to military assaults, including surprise attacks on their communities. In the words of plantation owner and English military commander Thomas Nairne of Charleston, the English "destroy'd the whole Country, burnt the Towns, brought all the Indians, who were not kill'd or made Slaves, into our own Territories, so that there remains not now, so much as one Village with ten Houses in it, in all Florida, that is subject to the Spaniards" (qtd. in Riordan 27).

Nairne’s comments suggest that due to English enslavement practices, the Calusa probably comprised some part of the cheap labor force on Carolinian plantations in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. After English-led incursions along the coast, military leaders captured and transported many Natives to various plantations across the region, especially those in the Carolina territories, where they were subsequently enslaved. According to Florida historian Patrick Riordan, “Indian slaves became the fastest-growing segment of the South Carolina population in the 1708 census” (27). Spanish documents support the claim that early eighteenth century slaving raids decimated the Calusa population. These attacks caused a major shift in Calusa political policy with Spain, including the migration of 270 Calusa to Havana (Hann). Based on Spanish documents, the Calusa owed part of their decline to English-based slavery and warfare. This history suggests that when Hammon’s ship struck the reef,
Calusa warriors and boatmen took action in order to stave off a potential English attack or even a slave raid.

In the captivity narratives that were popular in New England and elsewhere during the Seven Year’s War, the origin of the story usually involved an unsuspecting attack on an isolated farm or village located somewhere on the periphery of English colonial territory. In these stories, the conflict begins with a violent, unprovoked attack on supposedly innocent English settlers. However, as the history regarding English enslavement of the Calusa and other Native populations of Florida demonstrates, from the Calusa perspective, the origins of the conflict in this Narrative go back much further than an assault on a single mercantile ship in 1748.

That the Calusa were victims of British imperialism and slaving practices offers one theory as to why they may have preserved his life. Recognizing that Hammon was probably a British slave (which he was), the Calusa warriors attacked the ship to assist him in escaping that enslavement. Due to the fears of their own possible captivity, as well as the circulation of news and political developments across the region, the Calusa must have been fully aware of the growing English dependence on African slave labor, particularly in the nearby Carolina territories. Such news would likely have come from passing Spanish ships, such as the one that eventually picked up Hammon in Florida and brought him to Cuba. Situated in the maritime circuits between Spanish-held St. Augustine and Havana, the Calusa may have heard news of the proliferation of runaway black slaves fleeing colonial English plantations in the Carolinas beginning in the late seventeenth century. As Landers has examined in detail, these slaves often fled to St. Augustine, where, in exchange for services and conversion to Catholicism, they could
enjoy relative freedom (Landers 22-24). Partly due to the escalation of military tensions with the English, by 1738 St. Augustine Governor Manuel de Montiano granted unconditional freedom to all fugitives from Carolina. This act coincided with the establishment of a Florida refuge for escaped slaves, Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, located near St. Augustine. As Landers points out, “News regarding Spain’s sanctuary policy in Florida and the existence of Fort Mose spread rapidly northward through the fledgling English colony of Georgia to the expanding plantations of South Carolina, where roughly thirty thousand blacks were tied to the arduous rice economy by the mid-1730s” (32-33). This context suggests that the Calusa may have perceived Hammon to be a captured British slave from the Carolina region. Taking Hammon from the ship and preserving his life was more about helping to free a Black man from the clutches of notorious British slave practices. From this perspective, the Calusa could have believed they were liberating Hammon from the English, rather than capturing him. This fact could not have been lost on Hammon, whether he was happy to be in Florida or not.

Literary and historical documentation support the view that Native tribes in Florida were historically hospitable to outsiders, particularly men of color. When Hammon was plucked from the blue waters off the Florida Coast, he was stumbling into a network of affiliations between Black and Native cultures with a long history in the Southeast. Landers’s research pinpoints an established history of relations between marooned slaves, free blacks and the Calusa (and their allies) beginning almost as soon as Europeans began entering Florida (13). One provocative account involves the African
slave Estevan, one of the four survivors of the Panfilo de Narvaez expedition to La Florida in 1528. According to Cabeza de Vaca’s account of the failed incursion, Estevan was able to quickly learn local indigenous languages and thus became an interpreter for the shipwrecked survivors (13). In addition, Conquistador Hernando De Soto’s expedition included several slaves. In one story, a slave named Gomez helped the female leader of an unidentified Native group in northern Florida escape capture by the Spaniards. Gomez later became her husband, left the de Soto party, and ran away with her to live in what is known today as Camden, South Carolina (14).

Despite its publication in a much earlier historical period, Hernando de Escalante Fontaneda’s *Memoir of Hernando D'Escalante Fontaneda, On the Country and Ancient Indian Tribes of Florida* (1575), documents black-Native cultural crossing among the Calusa in southern Florida. Hernando de Escalante Fontaneda was a Spanish shipwreck survivor who, like Hammon, survived a wreck on the Florida Keys and came to live with the Calusa for a period. Sometime after 1575, he published an account of his experiences among the Calusa. According to Fontaneda, when he arrived in Florida an unnamed black man (also former shipwreck survivor) was already an intimate member of the tribe and a strong ally to the Cacique, Carlos. Landers speculates that this man was probably “Luis,” a Spaniard with a Moorish background who was a part owner of a Spanish vessel out of New Spain (15). Luis plays a pivotal role in Fontaneda’s story, for he was fluent in the local language and had become the Calusa’s translator to outsiders. He was also a close relation to the cacique Carlos. During a pivotal moment in Fontaneda’s story, when the Cacique Carlos is preparing to decide whether to kill Fontaneda and members of his
party, Luis intervenes and saves Fontaneda’s life. Fontaneda’s story, when paired with that of Cabeza de Vaca, shows historical precedent for black-Native alliances in Florida. It also provides context for the Calusa’s liberation of Hammon and their acceptance of him into their community. Despite occurring in a much earlier period, these stories imply that Hammon was certainly not the first black man to find refuge and even cross-cultural acceptance among the Calusa.

In temporarily rescuing him from the legal conditions of British slavery, the Calusa granted Hammon a sense of subjectivity through communal affiliation that he did not possess as a colonial New England slave. Scholarship that builds on Patterson’s arguments for social death provides the foundation for interpreting Hammon’s subjectivity in this scene. To my knowledge, no scholars have situated Hammon’s text, or his experiences in Florida, in this context. By viewing Hammon’s life among colonial British slaveholders as one of social death, we can better understand why he may have received positive treatment from the Calusa. As mentioned in the Introduction, Saidiya Hartman’s analysis of nineteenth century "networks of affiliation” provides the theoretical grounds for developing this argument (59). A major feature of her argument concerns slaves’ social gatherings and late night dances, wherein “Pleasure is central to the mechanisms of identification and recognition that discredit the claims of pain but also to those that produce a sense of possibility – redress, emancipation, transformation, and networks of affiliation under the pressures of domination and the utter lack of autonomy” (58). “Pleasure,” in this case, is interpersonal. These pleasurable encounters are not revolutionary moments of resistance, nor are they permanently transformative. They are relatively quotidian instances of human connection, and she optimistically frames them as
positive, despite their ephemerality. They activate a slave’s subjectivity because they temporarily disrupt the omnipresence of social alienation. The “mechanisms of identification and recognition” are the fluid interactions between subjects that “redress” subjection. Taken together, the “possibility” energized by “affiliation” manifests when slaves encounter interpersonal moments of exchange that temporarily alleviate the totalizing isolation of enslavement. In light of Hartman’s arguments, when Hammon reveals that the Calusa “have us’d me pretty well,” he declares their interpersonal “recognition” of his humanity. This recognition temporarily relieves him of his status as chattel and replaces it with a form of personhood. The Calusa’s recognition of Hammon as someone more than a slave, as a human being worthy of emancipation, gestures to what Hartman calls the “sense of possibility” in such networks. Being “us’d pretty well” indicates the establishment of an alliance that marks him as a subject.

As mentioned in the Introduction, David George’s *An Account of the Life of Mr. David George, from Sierra Leone in Africa; given by himself in a Conversation with Brother Rippon of London, and Brother Pearce of Birmingham* (1793), includes a pivotal scene in which George, a runaway slave, finds sanctuary among southeastern Native tribes, specifically, the Creeks and the Natchez. In both cases, George represents experiences of cross-cultural alliances in the Southeast as empowering instances of humanizing connection set within the context of terror. Similar to Hammon’s *Narrative*, George’s *Account* describes black–Native relations as full of positive possibilities when, in referring to the Creek, he writes, “the people were kind to me” (334). George infuses his acceptance into Native culture by marking the significance of small acts of kindness. For George, the fact that the Creeks were “kind to me” imbues his relationships among
them with a sense of subjectivity that he could never fully realize as a slave colonial British society. In this scene, as with Hammon’s *Narrative*, Native culture signifies a space of relational possibility in which subjectivity is tied to communal recognition and acceptance.

Hartman’s claim and George’s *Account* raise important possibilities for reconfiguring Hammon’s experience among the Calusa. Importantly, George’s phrasing in this scene resembles Hammon’s revelation that the Calusa “us’d me well” and “were better to me than my Fears” (22). In George’s case, as with Hammon’s, networks of affiliation among black and Native peoples become manifest within the context of colonial terror and the omnipresent fear of social disconnection. However, I am not specifically arguing that what Hammon experiences in Florida can be classified as permanently transformative or revolutionary in any sense – he does not provide enough clues to suggest these possibilities. What he does emphasize, and what this chapter has worked to establish up to this point, is that his experience among the Calusa should be understood within the framework of “networks of affiliation.” It transcended racial and cultural boundaries while simultaneously working to grant subjectivity to those classified as chattel by British colonial law. These boundaries were central to European-rooted discourses on the rigidity of racial difference. Eighteenth century discourses based in Enlightenment philosophy and the growing emphasis on scientific racism worked to prohibit the mingling of subaltern racial groups. Hammon’s unexpected participation in the networks of affiliation between circum-Caribbean indigenous and marooned slaves represents a disruption of these imperial modes of domination and subjection.

Complications over Hammon’s departure from Florida suggest that his alliance was
not a utopian encounter, however. While the text is remarkably silent about what takes place during his five-week stay, it is highly possible that Hammon experienced cross-cultural tension with the Calusa. The presence of tension, in and of itself, does not automatically dismiss the possibility that Hammon experienced an empowering sense of connection in his possible alliance with the Calusa. Nevertheless, the fact that he decides to leave after five weeks means that he did not find his experience positive enough to remain a permanent member of the community. According to the Narrative, his departure begins with a somewhat perplexing series of events that finds Hammon leaving Florida of his own free will by securing a passage on a passing Spanish schooner. He writes, “A Spanish Schooner arriving there from St. Augustine, the Master of which, whose name was Romond, asked the Indians to let me go on board his Vessel, which they granted, and the Captain knowing me very well, weigh’d Anchor and carry’d me off to the Havanna” (22). The ship, probably stopping to trade with the Calusa, becomes Hammon’s means of a relatively uneventful departure.

However, after arriving in Havana, Hammon is surprised to learn that the Calusa follow him to Cuba. They are angry over his departure and insist on compensation for his loss. This detail represents the Calusa as jilted victims of community disruption. The text explains:

after being there four Days the Indians came after me, and insisted on having me again, as I was their Prisoner; -- They made Application to the Governor, and demanded me again from him; in answer to which the Governor told them, that as they had put the whole Crew to Death, they

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The Narrative provides a footnote to the text, indicating that Hammon had actually met this Spanish Captain Romond years ago, when Hammon accompanied Winslow to the Caribbean. Between 1740-42, Winslow led a regiment of over five hundred Massachusetts colonial soldiers to Cartagena to fight the Spanish in what historians call “The War of Jenkins’ Ear.” Muster lists and newspaper reports confirm Winslow’s service record, but Hammon’s name cannot be found in these lists.
The *Narrative* reveals that for some reason the Calusa initially allow him to leave Florida without compensation. Why did they do so and why did they demand that he be returned? Is it possible that they were forced to hand him over by the Spanish captain? Was some kind of exchange negotiated between the Spanish and the Calusa, but the Calusa later realized they had allowed a valuable commodity to get away too cheaply? And what to make of the classification of him as their “prisoner”? 

In attempting to make sense of this scene, Bolster argues that Natives may have taken Hammon because he represented a valuable commodity. He observes, “When Hammon’s sloop was ‘cast away on Cape Florida,’ murderous Indian wreckers spared only him as they plundered the vessel” (28). Bolster fails to question the possible identities of these Natives and he relies on tropes of Native savagery in describing them. Nevertheless, he suggests that they may have spared him in order to sell or trade him in the marketplace. Alluding to the omnipresent threat of enslavement for black men in the Atlantic, he suggests that “a black shipmate might be worth more simply because he could be sold” (28). While Bolster offers a plausible theory for why they keep Hammon alive, according to the text, the Calusa originally do not ask for monetary compensation when Hammon departs the region on a passing Spanish merchant ship. Therefore, in what other ways might he have been valuable to them?

Historical context suggests that he could have been a valuable bargaining chip for the Calusa as they leveraged their vulnerable state of affairs on the coast at this time. Historian John Hann indicates that Spanish-Calusa commercial interactions were common in the eighteenth century, when the Calusa relied on Spanish ships for migratory
purposes. Hann writes, “So regular was this commerce that the natives came to depend on the fishermen for transportation for one leg of the seasonal migration, that part which took them from the Keys to the fishing grounds of Florida’s southwest coast” (326).

Commercial interaction was a vital cog in Spanish-Calusa relations, but particularly in the 1740s, when Spanish Jesuits made one last effort to convert the Calusa to Christianity. This attempt came after two centuries of Calusa resistance to Christian missionaries, or at least ambivalence over such prospects. Fr. Alana, one of the two Jesuit missionaries assigned to the Calusa in 1743, observed this phenomenon, noting that many Calusa spoke fluent Spanish which allowed them to trade effectively with officials, priests and mariners. He writes, “For the most part the adult men understand and speak Castilian moderately because of the frequent commerce with the boatmen from Havana” (qtd. in Hann 326). This context helps explain the presence of the Spanish schooner in Calusa coastal lands, and it provides context for Spanish-Calusa trade circuits. It fits with Amy Turner Bushnell’s observation that the Calusa were in contact with fishermen from Cuba and they often “carried word of castaways to Havana” (38).36

This context does not adequately address why the Calusa suddenly appear in Cuba

36 Additional historical context provides a wider lens on Calusa-Spanish relations in this moment. For example, as far back as 1688, the Calusa cacique Carlos, hoping to improve diplomatic relations with Cuban officials, sent a party of nearly three hundred Calusa to Havana. Many among them converted to Christianity as a show of diplomacy. The group included important leaders from the Calusa and several allied native tribes along the southern coast of Florida. It also included several members of his family, particularly his son, who was sent to the Jesuit’s university in Havana (Worth 8). During the first two decades of the eighteenth century, many Calusa sought refuge in Cuba after surviving a series of attacks on their villages. The Yamasee of northwestern Florida commenced military raids into Calusa territory in order to strengthen their own alliances with English plantation owners in the Carolinas. These raids, which turned Calusa captives into English slaves, resulted in large severe population losses. The Calusa sent willing survivors to Havana in 1704 and 1711. Hann writes, “Such intermeshing interests created a strong bond of trust in the Spaniards, as indicated in the Indians’ confidence in seeking refuge in Cuba in 1704 and 1711” (326).
as frustrated merchants who had allowed their so-called “prisoner” to escape. Regarding this detail, the descriptions of the actions and intentions of the Calusa are mediated through the *Narrative’s* storytelling. The pro-English bias of the text suggests one reason why Hammon may have been characterized as a “prisoner.” Another involves linguistics. Did Hammon overhear this conversation between Calusa and Spanish officials and, if so, in what language were these negotiations conducted? Observations by Jesuit priests trying to evangelize the Calusa in the 1740s indicate that language barriers would not have been a problem in Hammon’s negotiation. According to Weber, “In 1743, a Jesuit who visited a small group of Indians at the mouth of the Miami River in South Florida was surprised to find them speaking Spanish. Far from any Spanish mission or settlement, those Calusa and Key Indians had learned Spanish from sailors from Havana, with whom they traded” (305). While this detail suggests the negotiation over Hammon’s release may have been conducted in Spanish (or at least partly in Spanish), it raises the question of how Hammon would have known what was being said? How accurate was his recollection of this conversation when he sat down to recall it a decade later? Since the ideological weight of the term “prisoner” rests on these ambiguities, once again, Hammon’s “omissions” offer more questions than answers. Readers are left to wonder whether the Calusa ever classified Hammon as a prisoner, or whether they used some other term to explain his temporary membership in their community.

An additional insight revealed by this scene is the Calusa’s active pursuit of their sovereignty at this time. If there is one thing that the *Narrative* is clear about, the Calusa were involved in the circum-Caribbean exchange of black sailors. They certainly recognized that the Spanish in Cuba would pay them for these sailors. They negotiated
with the Governor that they should “take as many of them as they could, of those that should be cast away, and bring them to him, for which he would pay them Ten Dollars a-head” (22). This detail is a reminder that although the Calusa were among the most powerful and influential of Florida’s indigenous groups during the initial periods of European contact, by the middle of the eighteenth century they had become increasingly vulnerable on several fronts. Their strategies for remaining sovereign included finding ways to depend on Spanish aid while shielding themselves from outright extinction. Rescuing black sailors from British ships and handing them over to Spanish authorities represents a strategy for remaining sovereign. It also means that they were trafficking in slaves and free black men. Perhaps they felt that if Hammon did not want to remain part of the community, they could leverage his position among them for financial gain, which might in turn allow them to resist their own version of social death.

Possible sources of conflict between Hammon and the Calusa, represented in the Narrative’s problematic characterization of him as a so-called “captive” and “prisoner,” resemble the Reverend John Marrant’s temporary confinement among the Cherokee in his autobiography, *A Narrative of the Lord’s wonderful Dealings With John Marrant, A Black* (1785). Most scholars working with Hammon’s text have noted the similarities with Marrant’s *Narrative*. It is widely accepted Marrant was the captured prisoner of the Cherokee Nation. The scene begins when a Cherokee hunter in the wilderness outside of Charleston, South Carolina, stumbles upon the lost and starving Marrant, who has wandered into the woods. After an initial confrontation, the two become unlikely travel companions. They hunt for over ten weeks, engage in “constant conversation,” and in the process, Marrant receives “a fuller knowledge of the Indian tongue” (117). His linguistic
skill becomes essential to his survival, for when he returns with the hunter to the leaders of the Cherokee Nation, they view him as an enemy to execute, not once, but twice. According to the story, God’s divine intervention and Marrant’s own linguistic dexterity save him from death. In the first part of the scene, he prays in the Cherokee language, “which wonderfully affected the people” (118). Marrant’s last-minute prayer moves his captors to temporarily free him. Shortly thereafter, Marrant finds himself ready to be executed again for offending the Cherokee Chief. This time, divine intervention causes the Chief to relent, and “all my enemies to become my great friends” (120).

A surface reading of this conflict seems to characterize the Cherokee as savage heathens prone to irrational violence of innocent people. In this way, the text eerily resembles traditional representations of Hammon’s Narrative. However, if we pair Marrant’s experiences among the Cherokee with his life in Charleston before his Native encounter, a new reading emerges. According to his version of events, before wandering into the wilderness, a thirteen-year old Marrant quarrels with his family over his decision to convert to Methodism. The quarrel develops into accusations that Marrant is “crazy,” which leads him to conclude, “I thought it was better for me to die than to live among such people” (115). Alienation and social disconnection—in this case rejection from his own kinship network—leads Marrant to flee into the woods, whereupon he meets the aforementioned Cherokee hunter who befriends him. While it may be an overstatement to claim that Marrant experiences social death in this family conflict, the point is that alienation leads to the search for new connection. That new connection, in this case, can be found in Native networks of affiliation. Although this network is initially hostile, it is eventually hospitable to the degree that Marrant develops “great friends” in his Native
community. What looks like a traditional captivity tale from one perspective takes on a new look when placed in the context of social alienation and the recreation of social life. When paired with Hammon’s *Narrative*, there are obvious similarities, especially considering that an amanuensis also assisted in publishing Marrant’s account.\(^\text{37}\) Both men unwittingly stumble into Native networks, experience some degree of cross-cultural conflict, and find acceptance and even an empowering sense of subjectivity.

In returning to the focus of this chapter, Hammon replaces an experience of English slavery—the terror of surveillance, a lack of autonomy and an objectified humanity—with a more empowering form of subjectivity among the Calusa. In doing so, he recreates social life out of social death. He steps into an empowering space of relational possibility when his vulnerability merges with the Calusa’s own fragile position. The continued dwindling of their population, combined with the growing threat of Spanish and English naval power in the region, would have created a very real threat of destruction. This cultural razing would become nearly complete by the time Hammon returned to Boston in 1760. An additional theory posits that the Calusa may have brought Hammon ashore to fortify the dwindling numbers. Captivity scholar Gordon Sayre argues that many Native captives in early North America were not taken for ransom or to punish the captives (6). They were not taken as random acts of “terrorism” (6). In many cases, they were taken for other reasons, such as to enhance the tribe or the nation. He writes, “Captives were valuable human lives who could add to the strength of a village; thus they were integrated into the tribe of their captors through a process so foreign to

\(^{37}\) William Aldridge was Marrant’s editor and helped with the initial writing and publication of his text (Zafar 54).
European notions of identity that captivity narrators often failed to understand it” (8).
The Calusa may have identified a shared sense of connection with black slaves they encountered on wrecked British ships. This form of connection, however transient, may have offered a mutual sense of relief in the form of shared struggle and solidarity for both parties.

Unlike other captivity narratives, Hammon is surprisingly silent about his experiences during the approximately five weeks he spends among his Native hosts. One detail is that the Calusa share “boil’d corn, which was often what they ate themselves” (7). The Calusa’s apparent willingness to share what they eat with Hammon invites deeper speculation about their positive treatment of him. That the Calusa shared a dish made of boiled corn may have both literal and symbolic meaning for Hammon. Skeptical readers may conclude that by giving him “boil’d corn, which was often what they ate themselves,” the Calusa may have been simply feeding a prisoner to keep him alive. Symbolically, they may have also been inviting him to participate in a ritual of reciprocity based on the Calusa’s notion of interdependent connection.

Native practices of food sharing resembles what Lisa Brooks study of eighteenth and nineteenth century, northeastern Native networks of affiliation. She focuses on the Abenaki word for dish, “Wlogan,” or “common pot” (3). The metaphor of the shared dish describes the “conceptualization of a cooperative, interdependent Native environment that emerges from within Native space as a prominent trope in the speeches and writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (3). It was an historical term, but began to be used more frequently by tribal leaders as colonial control over Native people and lands increased. It was also a symbolic term meant to signify the nourishment of a
tribal body or a network of inhabitants through the sharing of resources, and, most importantly, ideas around reciprocity and interdependence. She writes, “The Common Pot is that which feeds and nourishes. It is the wigwam that feeds the family, the village that feeds the community, the networks that sustain the village” (3-4). As Brooks indicates, food sharing was both a literal and metaphorical feature of Native life. Sharing a common pot extended to the sharing of values, ideologies, resources and even romantic intimacies. These affiliations may have been built and nurtured as households of slaves shared a common dish, passing it from person to person as they conversed. These relations also resemble the political mixing that occasionally threatened the governing of relational networks. Alliances among Black and Native slaves in southern Massachusetts in the eighteenth century grew as many slaves and free-Blacks found refuge among southern New England Native groups. Thus, the common pot represents an important signifier for the ways that Native groups welcomed and incorporated outsiders into their communities.

Certainly Brooks’ study is more focused on the employment of this concept in the writings of northeastern U.S. Native groups. However, evidence suggests that southeastern Native groups may have held similar beliefs. Creek, Seminole and Cherokee peoples had a shared dish of corn (and occasionally meat) called the “sofkee” or “safki” (Braund). Derived from the Creek word, ”osafki,” meaning hominy, the sofkee pot was a common feature in most homes and family members and visitors would eat from it throughout the day. This traditional dish was an essential feature of family bonding and strengthening community networks. An example of the importance of the sofkee pot to southeastern indigenous peoples was recorded by William Bartram (1739-
1823) in his eighteenth century travels throughout this region. He described, “the most favorite dish the Indians have amongst them is Corn thin Drink seasoned with hicory nut Oil” (qtd. in Braund 44). In visiting one Seminole family, Bartram was invited to partake in the dish. He described it as, “in this bowl is a great wooden ladle; each person takes up in it as much as he pleases, and after drinking until satisfied, returns it again into the bowl, pushing the handle towards the person in the circle, and so it goes round” (44).

Although Bartram’s description of the sofkee as a communal common pot was practiced among northern Florida Natives, Hammon’s Narrative suggests that the Calusa may have developed a similar practice. When Hammon ate “corn” during his five-week stay in Florida, he may have been participating in ceremonies designed to welcome him into the community.

This gesture of hospitality provides a more critical insight into the Calusa’s possible liberation of Hammon. They may have been sending him the message that he was welcome, secure, and liberated from the bonds of slavery. His text attributes the preservation of his life and their kind hospitality to the work of God: “But the Providence of God order’d it other ways, for He appeared for my Help, in this Mount of Difficulty, and they were better to me than my Fears” (6). However, the cultural acceptance of free Black men and marooned slaves among the Calusa was most responsible for his positive reception. From his perspective, he may or may not have even been able to interpret why he was taken from the ship and why he was treated well. Perhaps those tribal members who communicated in “broken English” could have shared the meaning and symbolism behind their sharing of the common pot with him (6).
The significance of incorporating the notion of the common pot to this analysis resonates with scholar Tiya Miles’ observations on nineteenth century Black-Native relations. In 1998 She co-hosted a conference at Dartmouth entitled, “‘Eating Out of the Same Pot’: Relating Black and Native (Hi)stories.” She took this name from a quote given in an interview in a 1940 WPA (Works Progress Administration) interview by a black man formerly held as a slave by Creeks. In the interview he was asked to compare his slave experience with that of African-Americans enslaved by whites. He responded, “I was eating out of the same pot with the Indians, going anywhere in this country I wanted to, while they was still licking the master’s boots in Texas” (qtd. in Miles “Eating” xvi). For Miles, this quotation illustrates the ways that people of African descent transported and transformed cultures, created intersectional communities, and built metaphysical as well as physical homes on Native lands and within Native cultural landscapes. In the process, they altered their interior worlds as well as those of Native peoples. (2-3)

Miles’ arguments support the point I wish to make here, which is that texts such as Hammon’s *Narrative* exist at the intersection of African diasporic and Native American experience in North America. His text represents a cultural production that belongs in the growing realm of these studies. When Miles argues that, “Native America has been and continues to be a critical site in the histories and lives of dispersed African peoples” (“Eating” 3), she challenges scholars to reconsider how we view instances of so-called “captivity” in texts such as Hammon’s. When Hammon discloses that the Calusa “gave me boil’d corn, which was often what they ate themselves,” his revelation evokes the metaphor of the “common pot” that has been so integral to black-Native cultural histories.
Conclusion

My reading complicates the oversimplified critique that Hammon was simply a captive of savage and barbarous heathens. It re-imagines the Calusa as agents acting not only in their own political and cultural interests, but also in the interests of other vulnerable subjects circulating in the circum-Atlantic maritime space of coastal Florida. This alternative reading of Hammon’s experiences in Florida is based on the notion that vulnerable black and Native peoples in the eighteenth century sometimes formed temporary alliances designed to mediate the oppression and exploitation of slavery and domination.

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In Marshfield, MA, the Winslow house is now a historically preserved heritage site where visitors can tour the home of distinguished and highly venerated colonial English family with ancestral roots dating to the Mayflower. Built in 1699 by John Winslow’s father, Isaac, the home features an impressive collection of furniture, dishware, books, and artwork assembled throughout the years, many of which date to General John Winslow’s life on the estate. Just inside the entryway, the Jacobean stairway represents a unique example of eighteenth century craftsmanship and art. It leads visitors to a second floor, where stately bedrooms display the material benefits of an early New England, bourgeois lifestyle. Examples include the wonders of ornately carved wooden beds, magnificently decorated linens, and a display of eighteenth century children’s toys. It is clear to any visitor that despite the challenges of living in eighteenth century Massachusetts, the Winslow family enjoyed a degree of comfort and pleasure.
Upstairs, visitors can find two simple rooms that lack the homey, nostalgic feel of the other rooms. They also lack the basic amenities, such as the fireplaces that can be found in nearly every other room in the house. In displaying these rooms, curators have included a simple, rustic bed with a straw mattress, dated to the period in which servants and slaves lived in the home. In these rooms lived captured men and women whose labors made possible the splendid opulence collected by several generations worth of Winslow wealth and political power. It is also in these rooms that Briton Hammon, Nab Nowitt, and many others rested their heads at the end of the day. In the quiet cold of these rooms, a small community of African and Native slaves and servants sat together, told stories, and created meaningful personal bonds that helped make the pains of each day just a little easier, a little more comforting.
Chapter Two

Olaudah Equiano and the Miskito Indians in Central America

*This kind of Christian fellowship I had never seen, nor ever thought of seeing on earth; it fully reminded me of what I had read in the Holy scriptures of the primitive Christians, who loved each other and broke bread, in partaking of it, even from house to house.*

-Olaudah Equiano\(^{38}\)

*I made such progress with this youth, especially in religion, that when I used to go to bed at different hours of the night, if he was in his bed, he would get up on purpose to go to prayer with me, without any other clothes than his shirt; and before he would eat any of his meals amongst the gentlemen in the cabin, he would first come to me to pray, as he called it.*

-Olaudah Equiano\(^{39}\)

In one of the final scenes of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Written by Himself* (1794), Olaudah Equiano describes his brief but meaningful cross-cultural alliance with a young Sambo-Miskito Indian leader as the two travel across the Atlantic on a voyage from London to the shores of Central America.\(^{40}\) Equiano, a recently converted Methodist, attempts to put his new spiritual devotion to work as he steps aboard the *Morning Star*. Selected by his close friend, Dr. Charles Irving, to supervise Irving’s plantation, Equiano imagines himself as an “instrument, under God” of

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\(^{38}\) This quote can be found on 184.

\(^{39}\) This quote can be found on 203.

\(^{40}\) There are a wide variety of spellings of the Miskito Coast and the Miskitu people. Historians and anthropologists typically use Miskitu, Miskito, or Mosquito, while eighteenth-century settlers, traders and writers tended to use the terms Mosquito, Musquito, or Mosqueto. I have taken my cue from Karl Offen, the foremost scholar on the Miskitu of the eighteenth century, so I will use “Miskito Coast” and “Mosquitia” to describe the region, while using “Miskitu” or the more specific designations “Sambo-Miskito” and “Tawira-Miskito” to collectively reference the people who lived in this region.
bringing “some poor sinner to my well beloved master, Jesus Christ” (203). Showing familiarity with the non-Christian population of Mosquitia, he sets off on the voyage believing the “harvest was fully ripe in those parts” (203). As he moves throughout the cabin, he discovers four Miskitu Indian leaders on board the ship. They are returning home after a yearlong diplomatic trip to London to negotiate issues pertaining to the British enslavement of the Miskitu. He encounters the eighteen-year old “prince” George as a potential “pupil” in whom he can “sow the good seed” (203). As the ship heads out across the Atlantic, the two men strike up what the Interesting Narrative describes as a mutual alliance based primarily on Equiano’s interest in teaching the young man English literacy and converting him to Methodism. Equiano finds “great delight” in their conversations, feeling especially pleased by George’s dedication to “prayer, as he called it” (203). For much of the voyage, Equiano finds George to be an apt pupil, and their bond strengthens. That is, until fellow sailors mock the prince for his interest in Equiano and Christianity, which causes George to end the alliance. For Equiano, the conflict “grieved me very much” (204). For George, it “depressed his spirits very much” and left him “fond of being alone” (204). However, Equiano’s alliance with the Miskitu people does not end with George on the Morning Star. It

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41 For the purposes of this chapter I am relying on the ninth and final British edition of The Interesting Narrative, edited by Vincent Carretta, which is the one most scholars accept as the authoritative scholarly text. Originally published in 1789, Equiano subsequently edited and reprinted eight new editions over a five year span. Scholars are indebted to Paul Edwards for his recovery and reproduction of the first publication of the Interesting Narrative in 1969.

42 George was traveling with his uncle, “Duke” Isaac, as well as two Ulwa Indians named Richard and John. According to Michael Olien, some have argued that the English bestowed these titles on the Miskitu. In this view, the Miskitu were political puppets and the titles an example of British mockery of Miskitu leadership. Olien challenges this claim, arguing that they predate English presence in the region (199).
extends to the maritime contact zone of the Miskito Shore, where his connections with local leaders eventually allow him to escape re-enslavement.

This compelling scene occurs near the end of the *Interesting Narrative*, after Equiano has purchased his freedom and proclaimed his devotion to Methodism. Despite the rise in the *Interesting Narrative*’s popularity in the last twenty years, it remains largely overlooked by scholars. Recently, Emily Donaldson Field has argued for its significance, maintaining that in Equiano’s representations of Native Americans he “bears a special resemblance to them, given his status as a recently ascended primitive” (17). In making this claim, Field builds on Adam Potkay’s arguments for the *Interesting Narrative* as an allegorical spiritual autobiography. In this allegory, Equiano moves from unenlightened pagan to oppressed slave to free and redeemed Christian (680). While I agree the text does represent Equiano in a hierarchically superior position to George, these arguments fail to consider the intersubjective dimensions of Equiano’s text, as well as the importance of this intersubjectivity in relation to his experiences of social death. Potkay sees Equiano’s spirituality as a solitary endeavor—an individual pursuit of redemption. Thus, he fails to consider how Equiano insists upon interpersonal relationships as essential to his spirituality and his overall quest for subjectivity. In addition, Potkay’s allegorical reading de-politicizes the relationship between Equiano’s Methodism and his search for racial justice. Furthermore, in Field’s reading, the Miskitu people are abstractions. Her analysis implies that their presence in the text only serves as a point of comparison for Equiano’s own spiritual identity. As Equiano makes clear,

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43 Potkay argues that the text metaphorically resembles a personal “salvation history” (680). Resembling the Old Testament version of Moses’ journey to slavery and then freedom, the *Interesting Narrative* fashions a linear progression of his spiritual development from uncivilized, illiterate, African pagan to enlightened Christian (692).
George, his companions, and the rest of the Miskitu people were not abstractions. They were real human beings. As with many indigenous peoples throughout the hemisphere, they were struggling to remain politically sovereign while resisting British and Spanish empires that were vying for their land and resources. Although the Miskito had been successful in repelling recent British attempts to fully colonize them, the English had recently begun a systematic process of capturing and enslaving the Miskitu and selling them to Jamaican plantations (Offen “Blacks and Blackness” 107). This context suggests that Equiano encounters George and his companions at a particularly fragile moment in their quest to remain a sovereign people.

Equiano seizes upon this vulnerability in his encounter with the Miskitu by drawing parallels to his own experiences of social death. I argue that he frames a shipboard alliance with George as an intersubjective bond forged between racialized others seeking to remain human in a world that rarely recognized them as such. To develop this argument, I contextualize this scene by placing it within others that reflect Equiano’s search for intersubjectivity. These include his representations of the communal spirit of Igboland, several of his cross-cultural relations at sea, and his search for organized religion. Regarding the latter, as the quotation at the outset of this chapter illustrates, the search for “fellowship” represents an important clue in how he reconstructs his own sense of subjectivity. In the scene described above, Equiano’s evangelical Christianity acts as the glue that binds him together with George. However, the intersubjective nature of their relationship crumbles because he ultimately prioritizes commitment to religion over maintenance of the alliance. This is a form of fellowship based on Equiano’s terms, and when George resists it, Equiano cannot flexibly respond.
Nevertheless, by advocating for an intersubjective reading of this part of Equiano’s autobiography, this chapter also challenges scholarship that celebrates his text as a success story of political liberalism. As I argued in the Introduction, Vincent Carretta relies on the trope of the rags to riches tale. He binds Equiano to a liberal tradition that champions the rugged individual who pulls up his bootstraps and gets to work when life gets tough. This reading inadvertently distances Equiano from the meaningful, interdependent relationships that he describes in his text. These relationships nurture him, sustain him, and keep him alive. They are crucially important to the *Interesting Narrative*’s portrayal of Equiano as a transnational, black intersubject.

The form of the autobiography is implicated in scholarly arguments for Equiano’s individualism. As an aesthetic form, the genre of autobiography privileges the individual’s role as narrator and obscures larger communities to which that individual belongs. The form privileges a single voice instead of many—a single instrument, rather than a chorus. As Lisa Lowe observes, Equiano’s autobiography emerges at a pivotal moment in the rise of liberalism in the Atlantic world. She argues, “It exemplified mastery of the languages for defining and delimiting humanity, from liberal political philosophy and Christian theology, to the mathematical reason necessary for economy, trade, and navigation” (101). Most critics seem to agree that Equiano’s autobiography attempts to speak for the collective voices of millions of emancipated and still-enslaved men and women that never had an opportunity to write and publish their own stories. The problem is, as Lowe explains, “autobiography, as a genre of liberal political narrative that affirms individual right, may precisely contribute to the ‘forgetting’ of the collective subject of colonial slavery” (102). The potential dangers of “forgetting the collective
subject” come with a high price, as Lowe argues, in that this amnesia erases the
“heteronomous subaltern collectivity necessary to the abolition of the system of
colonialism itself” (102). Indeed, the major purpose of this chapter is to better
understand Equiano’s representation of collectivity, cooperation, and interconnection.
The form of the text somewhat limits these aims. By reading for what Lowe calls the
“ellipses, interruptions, and contradictory shifts in voice or tempo that surround particular
episodes” my analysis of Equiano’s text tries to push past a study of Equiano the
“individual” to better understand his sense of intersubjectivity throughout his
autobiography.

Equiano, Intersubjectivity, and Methodism

Many scholars have noted that Equiano emphasizes the Eden-like qualities of
Essaka in his descriptions of Africa. In doing so, he sets up a dualistic comparison that
juxtaposes the economic corruption and the religious hypocrisy of the western world with
the cultural purity of Igbo pastoral life (Andrews 58; Fichtelberg 59; Potkay). What these
scholars have not mentioned is that Equiano also highlights the intersubjective
dimensions of life among the Igbo. This allows him to ground his life story as one that
begins with intersubjectivity as a cultural foundation. In the building of village homes,
the Igbo are inspired by reciprocated acts of benevolence and charity. In summarizing
the communally oriented ways that the Igbo work together to build houses, he writes,
“Everyman is a sufficient architect for the purpose. The whole neighbourhood afford
their unanimous assistance in building them and in return receive, and expect no other
recompense than a feast” (36). Tribal members willingly support one another without
desiring monetary compensation. Culturally generous and altruistic, they avoid selfish benefits for personal gain. Instead, “Everyone contributes something to the common stock” (38). He associates these references to the common good with recollections on the close bonds he shares with his mother. He is “a great favourite” and “almost constantly with her,” who “used to take particular pains to form my mind” (46). This presents an image of Equiano learning how to see the world and relate to others through a close bond with his mother. When he “look[s] back with pleasure on the first scenes of my life,” it is to recollect the closeness of seemingly ordinary, but meaningful, kin relations in the context of a community that emphasizes the common good in its everyday practices.

The interdependent pursuits of the Igbo, combined with the intimacy of the mother-son relationship, demonstrate how the Interesting Narrative implies that foundations of intersubjectivity are built into the structures of Igbo culture. Among the Igbo, Equiano is human. What makes him human is his participation in free and open exchanges of communal relations where everyone seems to be looking out for one another’s best interests. Subjects do not exist separately from other subjects. Subjectivity emerges in relationship to others, and through an ongoing process of recognizing, and being recognized by others. In this analysis, my use of the word “recognition” attends to Jessica Benjamin’s definition of intersubjectivity, which I outlined in the Introduction. Benjamin’s analysis frames the differences between Equiano’s descriptions of an intersubjective Igbo and his representations of life as a subjected slave in the West. As a member of Igbo culture he participates in an interactive communal ethic. Villagers constantly attend to one another’s needs through reciprocal exchange. In the process, all simultaneously recognize and receive a subjectivity that is
inseparable from the community itself. Furthermore, his bond with his mother gives rise
to a one-on-one relationship in which a young boy’s sense of himself is reflected in his
mother’s “formation” of him. This definition implies a delicate power balance that
affords each subject the space of mutual recognition.

Despite the positive connotations of intersubjectivity, I do not imply that it
promotes a romanticized view of human relations. In this text Igboland is a patriarchal
society that participates in the enslavement of fellow Africans, and these characteristics
disrupt Equiano’s representation of intersubjective bonds, even as he goes to great
lengths to portray them in strictly positive terms. Among the Igbo, slaves are prisoners of
war who “do no more work than other members of the community, even their master”
(40). They share “food, clothing, and lodging,” leading him to remark, “how different
was their condition from that of slaves in the West-Indies” (40). Here he contrasts the
forms of slavery in West Africa with those in the Atlantic world to imply that the Igbo
practice more benevolent forms of captivity that still recognize the subjectivity of the
enslaved. In fact, “some slaves even own their own slaves” (40). It seems the only
subjection that slaves experience is that which the “head of a family possesses in our
state,” and which “he exercises over every part of his household” (40). He implies that
slaves in an Igbo household occupy the same rank as that of women and children,
suggesting that women resemble slaves in Igbo culture. Thus, discursively embedded in
his vision of an intersubjective Igbo culture is a Biblical sense of masculine authority
traced to “Abraham and the other patriarchs” (44). While Equiano may be appealing to
his Christian audiences when he links Old Testament foundations to the Igbo, nonetheless
his vision of communal reciprocity is tinged with unequal gender relations.
Descriptions of kidnapping, the middle passage and his early experiences in Virginia characterize European slavery as an agonizing severing of interpersonal kin relations. While these may be affective representations of the brutality of the market, they also mark the slave’s removal from intersubjective networks. As the first three chapters conclude, and Equiano survives the middle passage, he offers a pointed reflection on the individual merchant and the mathematical, calculating, liberal marketplace, which work together to destroy intersubjective relations. Upon landing in Barbados and being shipped to the auction yard, he watches with horror as “relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again” (61). Just as he endured the loss of his mother, father, and sister, he observes the separation of “several brothers, who, in the sale, were sold in different lots; and it was very moving on this occasion to see and hear their cries at parting” (61). The sentimental observation on the destruction of kinship ties clashes with the rational business deals of the merchants, who “make choice of that parcel they like best” (61). Here, Equiano refers to them as “ministers of destruction,” based on their rational dismantling of kinship networks. At this point in the text, Equiano concludes the chapter by altering his voice and tone to directly address Christian readers. In doing so, he directly challenges the insufficiencies of a liberal, Christian culture that possesses the collective inability to empathize with the human beings they buy and sell. By employing this rhetoric, he seems to imply that Anglo-Christian cultures insufficiently prioritize intersubjectivity. However, the problem is not cultural or religious. The problem is implementation. According to Equiano, Christians fail to implement the fundamental biblical teachings that emphasize intersubjective relations. To make this point, he employs the Golden Rule—a fundamental scriptural
teaching found in both the Old and New Testaments (but not original to Christianity). In a quote worth reproducing in its entirety, he charges:

O, ye nominal Christians! Might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God? Who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every tender feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice? Are the dearest friends and relations, now rendered more dear by their separation from their kindred, still to be parted from each other, and thus prevented from cheering the gloom of slavery with the small comfort of being together and mingling their sufferings and sorrows? Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, or husbands their wives? Surely this is a new refinement in cruelty, which, while it has no advantage to atone for it, thus aggravates distress, and adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery. (61)

The Golden Rule signifies an ethic of reciprocity, or, that a human being has an obligation to actively recognize and honor another’s humanity. It promotes the sharing of power and vulnerability in an ongoing, uneven exchange of feelings and ideas. Like intersubjectivity, this interpersonal connection can be characterized as one in which each person recognizes another’s subjectivity. As Equiano has argued in preceding chapters, following the Golden Rule is standard practice in Igboland. Thus, in marking the beginning of his experiences as a slave in the Americas, it is significant that Equiano chooses to identify the “refinement in cruelty” in relational, not individual terms. While Equiano elsewhere chastises Anglo-Christians for their refusal to accept the individual rights and liberties of slaves, in this passage he accentuates the primary subjection of slavery as the failure of the dominant culture to properly fulfill its own intersubjective practices.

He enhances this point in the beginning of chapter four, when, upon arriving in Virginia, he pinpoints his experiences of physical and emotional isolation. He writes,
“We were landed up a river, a good way from the sea, about Virginia county, where we saw few of our native Africans, and not one soul who could talk to me…only myself was left…In this state I was constantly grieving, and wishing for death rather than anything else” (70). Slavery dehumanizes slaves by forcibly removing them from intersubjective human bonds. It separates them from cultural ties and distances from cultural connections. To be subjected is to be alone. In this portrayal, he provides support for Saidiya Hartman’s arguments outlined in the Introduction. Slaves are prevented from “the small comfort of being together,” which will allow them to “mingle their sufferings and sorrows.” As slaves, they will have to recreate intersubjectivity outside of traditional kinship networks.

In subsequent chapters leading up to his conversion to Methodism and his alliance with George, Equiano attempts to recreate these networks. The *Interesting Narrative* provides a series of instances in which Equiano encounters empowering, quotidian, cross-cultural relations while working on ships. These relations anticipate his eventual alliance with George. These relationships are not always intersubjective, but those that are signify intersubjectivity as a process of two-way communication. These relations, and their emergence in the context of transatlantic voyages, differentiate Equiano’s experiences from those of plantation slaves. Readers may recall my use of Saidiya Hartman’s analysis of plantation slaves’ “community among ourselves,” forged under the cover of darkness and away from the watchful surveillance of the master, which I outlined in the Introduction to this project. In contrast to those encounters, Equiano pursues cross-cultural relations with free white sailors in the confines of the traveling ship. In outlining the ways that newly enslaved Africans recreated social life on the other
side of the Atlantic, Smallwood argues, they “created kinship and community out of the aggregated units remaining after the market’s dispersal of its human wares” (183).

Equiano’s experiences resonate with Smallwood’s analysis. The Interesting Narrative tells us his first companion in the world of maritime slavery was Richard Baker, a working class young white boy who works on Equiano’s ship. Early in the text, after Captain Michael Henry Pascal purchases Equiano in Virginia and takes to England, Baker befriends him, teaches him to read and the two become fast friends. Equiano writes of Baker, “Soon after I went on board he shewed (sic) me a great deal of partiality and attention, and in return I grew extremely fond of him. We at length became inseparable; and, for the space of two years, he was of very great use to me, and was my constant companion and instructor” (72). In these characterizations, what Jessica Benjamin would describe as Baker’s “recognition” of Equiano grants the young slave a sense of intersubjectivity. What makes this recognition intersubjective is Equiano’s use of the word “inseparable.” Being inseparable in the literal sense implies that they went everywhere together. It also symbolizes a friendship in which neither person can fully distinguish his own sense of self outside of the relationship. To be inseparable in this case is to be intersubjective. One challenge to this, however, is his classification of Baker as his “instructor.” Again, in the literal sense, this implies that Baker taught him letters and translated for him. It also implies a power differential that, when paired with Baker’s legal freedom, disrupts a neat rendering of this relationship as fully intersubjective.

The key marker of this connection is open dialogue and two-way communication in the context of Equiano’s subordination. As Butler explains, “Recognition is neither an act that one performs nor is it literalized as the event in which we ‘see’ one another and
are ‘seen.’ It takes place through communication...in which subjects are transformed by virtue of the communicative practice in which they are engaged” (132). After his first visit to a church in England, he is “still at a great loss” to understand the activities of the ceremony. He turns to Baker, who “used to be my interpreter; for I could make free with him, and he always instructed me with pleasure” (68). The casual use of the word “free” is not coincidental. As a slave, he marks episodes of relative freedom carefully. These “free” conversations with Baker represent defining moments of intersubjective exchange. From this point forward, Equiano defines intersubjectivity as the process of reciprocated conversation.

Baker’s reciprocal recognition of Equiano as a subject echoes other relations in the text, including his connections with the female members of the Guerin family, members of Captain Pascal’s extended relations who accept Equiano, teach him to read, and take him to be baptized (78). The text also references various sailors who teach him literacy, math, and a variety of useful skills that allow Equiano to find employment during temporary forays into various ports. One of these sailors, Daniel Queen, “was like a father to me” (92). Queen teaches Equiano to cut hair and to read the Bible. Importantly, he “would instruct me in his business, by which I might gain a good livelihood” (92). While it is unclear what Queen receives in return for his generosity, the implication is that, like the Igbo helping to build one another’s houses, Queen practices the Golden Rule. He looks past racial differences when other whites cannot, and sees in

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44 This baptism, and the record located at St. Margaret’s Church in Westminster, is one of the primary sources of controversy over Equiano’s birthplace. As Cathy Davidson remarks, it is striking that Equiano provides a clear roadmap for readers to check the birth record because he details the location and time of his baptism. She implies that he knows the location of his birth on the record (S. Carolina) and she uses this logic to question whether Equiano (or the Guerin sisters) had reasons for recording his birthplace in an English colony (27-30).
Equiano a human being worthy of companionship. Equiano responds, “This gave me new life and spirits, and my heart burned within me” (92). He finds these quotidian interactions immensely empowering, leading him to declare, “Indeed I almost loved him with the affection of a son” (92). Living the Golden Rule on the Atlantic, in quotidian relationships that fly under the radar of the master’s surveillance, empowers Equiano with episodic experiences of personhood that propel him forward towards his eventual legal freedom.

Despite Equiano’s status as a slave, a status that definitively marks him as object and not subject, he iterates his own intersubjective self by portraying recognition as a two-way, subject-to-subject exchange. To be clear, this is recognition forged in the context of Equiano’s subordination. In the most literal sense, intersubjectivity cannot exist when one member of the relationship is not technically a subject. Nevertheless, Equiano clearly portrays certain relationships as reciprocal. The way he clarifies the relative sense of brief empowerment he receives from them is to juxtapose them with repeated instances of racialized exploitation and personal injury. During the middle portion of the text, Equiano is sold twice by his masters, promised manumission on multiple occasions, and cheated out of his wages and outside earnings by numerous captains and merchants. As a man of the sea, he circulates from port to port and reports on the horrific conditions of slavery he witnesses, from Jamaica to Georgia, and details innumerable instances of death and torture. One such instance clarifies the difference between a Butler-Benjamin view of intersubjectivity and a Hegelian notion of the master-slave dialectic. When Pascal surprises Equiano by selling him to Captain James Doran without warning, Equiano focuses on the difference between two-way communication
and silence through domination. After Doran announces, “you are now my slave,”
Equiano responds that “by the laws of the land no man has a right to sell me” (93).
Equiano adds, “Captain Doran said I talked too much English, and if I did not behave
myself well, and be quiet, he had a method on board to make me” (94). The scene ends
with Equiano’s “heart ready to burst with sorrow and anguish” (94). The source of his
suffering is the reality of subjection defined as alienation through forced silence. Doran’s
dominance of Equiano serves as a forceful reminder of the difference between the social
alienation of the master-slave relationship and the reciprocated friendships he experiences
with Baker and Queen.

The necessity of open communication, combined with a growing sense of
resisting racial injustice, eventually characterizes his search for organized religion. Later
in the text, when he finally purchases his manumission from his third master, the
Philadelphia Quaker Robert King, readers expect the *Interesting Narrative* to celebrate
this declaration as the climax of the text. It is not. Despite earning his freedom, and after
an exploratory voyage to the North Pole with his good friend, Dr. Charles Irving,
Equiano reconnects with friends in London and begins to feel “continually oppressed and
much concerned about the salvation of my soul, and was determined (in my own
strength) to become a first-rate Christian” (178). As Carretta points out, although he had
been baptized in 1759, he was ready to become “a Christian in fact as well as in name”
(163). He spends the first half of chapter ten searching for a faith community to no avail.
His bitterness with British Christians who willingly sanction the slave trade hampers his
ability to find a place of worship in which he can feel welcome. He is so angry that he
threatens to move away and live among the Turks, “who were in a safer way of salvation
than my neighbors” (179). Labeling Muslim Turks as more “neighborly” than British Christians was a criticism that would not be lost on British reading audiences. This comment implies that his priority is to find neighborly connection in a culture that does not racialize those of African descent as inferior.

After friends convince him to stay in England, he rejects the Anglican Church and focuses on his own personal relationship with God outside the purview of an official congregation. He reflects, “Thus I went on heavily without any guide to direct me the way that leadeth to eternal life…Here I was much staggered, and could not find any at that time more righteous than myself, or indeed so much inclined to devotion” (167). However, instead of providing the fulfillment he is searching for, spiritual self-reliance sends him spiraling into depression. Remarking on Equiano’s state at this time, Carretta observes, “Equiano’s dissatisfaction with his spiritual condition in 1773 was inevitable. He recognized only in retrospect that his faith in his own self-sufficiency was ‘the result of a mind blinded by ignorance and sin’” (162). In hindsight, Equiano realizes that spiritual individualism was not the solution for a man struggling with social alienation and the absence of “neighbours.” Equiano’s depression coincides with a failed attempt to help a fellow black sailor, John Annis, find liberty and amnesty in England from an oppressive white owner, William Kirkpatrick from St. Kitts. This anguish only adds to his malaise. Upon learning that Annis is sent back to St. Kitts and subsequently tortured, and murdered, Equiano falls into a deep melancholy. He laments, “Suffering much by villains in the late cause, and being much concerned about the state of my soul, these things (but particularly the latter) brought me very low; so that I became a burden to myself, and viewed all things around me as emptiness and vanity” (169). His spiritual
emptiness is augmented by his failure to save a fellow man of color from death in the West Indies. His blackness limits his ability to practice the Golden Rule to save Annis.

Equiano pursues Methodism because it offers him relief from these two problems. He clarifies that his search for religion is based on the need for “church-fellowship,” which he finds among a small faith community in the maritime district of London (193). He characterizes his quest as a series of open conversations with others who can help him address lingering feelings of social and spiritual alienation. For example, just after Annis’s death, he takes a walk through the port and meets a religious “old seafaring man who experienced much of the love of God shed abroad in his heart” (183). Importantly, this old sailor “began to discourse with me” (183). In this meeting, Equiano is not only moved by the particular religious dogma the old sailor offers, so much as by the opportunity for “the conversation,” which “rejoiced me greatly” (183). Shortly thereafter, a “dissenting minister” enters the house, joins the conversation, and eventually invites Equiano to a “lovefeast” at a local chapel (183). In these representations, Equiano pinpoints the significance of quotidian conversation to his subjectivity. Sharing a “discourse” with a sailor and a minister resembles his connections to Queen and Baker. That he is “rejoiced” is a sign that the fluid, interactive nature of these spiritual conversations invites a sense of intersubjectivity that he has struggled to find. Before turning to narrate his experience at the chapel, he pauses one last time to reflect on just how meaningful conversation is to him at this moment: “I weighed over the heavenly conversation that had passed between these two men, which cheered my then heavy and drooping spirit more than any thing I had met with for many months” (183). In this

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45 Equiano was probably referring to a Protestant minister who rejected the Anglican Church.
instance, something as simple as interpersonal dialogue is an unexpected antidote to his hopelessness.

These conversations lead Equiano to join the Methodists. The significance of this decision bears weight on his status as a person of color, his interest in converting George to Christianity, and his explicit need for human fellowship. In the early part of the eighteenth century, the First Great Awakening ushered in a transnational movement of evangelical Christianity that included, but also contested, Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. Celebrity preacher George Whitefield inaugurated an evangelical reform movement that found converts in whites, blacks, and Natives all along the Atlantic rim. In fact, the early traditions of black Atlantic writing emerge in this context. This movement captivated many black and Native writers and preachers, including Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammon, John Jea, James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, John Marrant, Boston King, and Samson Occom (Carretta 168). Supported by the Countess of Huntington, Selina Hastings, and eventually recognized as the Huntingdon Connexion (the Countess was responsible for building and registering churches all over England in the British-American colonies), Methodism was an evangelical movement that splintered off from the Anglican Church and it likely attracted Equiano for three reasons. First, it recognized all humans, even slaves, as capable of salvation. Second, it rejected the systematic, hierarchical structures of Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism. Individuals did not need the mediating force of a priest or minister for salvation. Equiano characterizes this in his declaration that Connexion Methodism offers him a “kind of Christian fellowship I had never seen, nor ever thought of seeing on earth; it fully reminded me of what I had read in the Holy scriptures of the primitive Christians, who
loved each other and broke bread, in partaking of it, even from house to house” (184).
This emphasis on “the fellowship” of the “primitive Christians” suggests the appeal of a grassroots religious brotherhood unchecked by institutional power. Third, Whitefield’s Methodist’s theology was inspired by Calvinist doctrines of the sixteenth century, which prioritized salvation through predestination instead of through good works. As Carretta argues, “a faith that depended on predestination for salvation rather than on spiritual rewards for good works such as charitable contributions or attendance at church may have been especially attractive to those whose ability to perform good works was severely limited by their social condition” (168).

Surely, his choice of Methodism was no accident. Although Equiano had not yet developed a strong political stance against slavery, it is impossible not to recognize that he selected one of the most popular religious followings for converted black and Native preachers at this time. As indicated by the list above, Wheatley, Jea, Marrant, Occom and others found in Methodism subversive messages that afforded people of color a sense of humanity not granted by other faiths, particularly Anglicanism. As Joanna Brooks has so forcefully shown, these and other religious leaders mobilized these forms of Methodism in pursuit of political and economic justice. They found in Methodism, and in the stories of the Bible, “stories that honored their haunted and paradoxical circumstances and offered some key into the mystery of personal and community redemption” (8). What Brooks proposes here is an intimate link between black and Native evangelicalism and the rebuilding of community of color in response to the systematic, racialized degradation of these communities throughout the Atlantic. For these authors, Methodism brings together the ideological and spiritual foundations to
transform the alienation of enslavement into a more stable sense of intersubjective belonging. This is not to suggest that all Methodists were against slavery, for Whitefield himself owned many slaves in his lifetime. But Methodism was far from a unified movement, and John Wesley’s division of Methodism opposed slavery, arguing that it contradicted “natural justice” (qtd. in Carreta 170). As Carretta explains, “eighteenth-century Methodism was perceived as far more subversive than the socially conservative Methodism of the following centuries” (167). The subversiveness lay in its acceptance of all, regardless of race, class or social status. Methodism’s fascination to Equiano can be found in its belief that “Africans be exposed to the truth of Christianity and be humanely treated in whatever social condition they were placed” (169). Like other transatlantic black and Native preachers, ministers, and religious followers, Equiano found something liberating and affirming in Methodism. Therefore, although he was not yet prepared to embrace a politically public stance against slavery at this point in the *Interesting Narrative*, the selection of Methodism and its subversiveness anticipates this decision.

When he eventually experiences his euphoric moment of conversion, he realizes that he is prepared to fully embrace his faith. Instead of celebrating this episode as an experience in individual enlightenment, he explicitly marks it as acceptance into a larger community. When he returns to his Methodist congregation in London, he describes being “received into church-fellowship amongst them” (179). In these passages, Equiano’s emphasis on “fellowship,” references to the close bonding of early Christians, and the symbolism of breaking bread together are evidence that his spiritual yearning is

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46 Wesley even wrote about the injustice of enslaving Africans in his *Thoughts upon Slavery* (Carretta 168-169).
intertwined with a need for intersubjectivity among those who will fully recognize him as a person. This is a faith marked not by institutional power, but by the authority of reciprocal care. In this community, “Christian fellowship” is one in which “each person communicated with his neighbour” (184).

This new spiritual quest was also more than an attempt to blindly follow the practices of those around him in Britain. As Brooks argues about eighteenth century African-American authors of religious texts, “They were not merely dupes, apologists, or victims of missionary colonialism, as they are sometimes made out to be” (18). In echoing other postcolonial scholars who interpret Black and Native conversion experiences as attempts at agency and self-determination, she argues, “Tropes of conversion figure the processes—death and resurrection, loss and reclamation, scattering and gathering, forgetting and remembering, abjection and testimony—through which blacks and Indians became ‘peoples’” (18). For Equiano, his conversion represents an act of self-determination and a desire for more fulfilling interpersonal connections. His spiritual rebirth in this scene represents an attempt to renew a sense of belonging that can address his social alienation.

**Transatlantic Conversion as Connection**

The context provided to this point establishes two things. First, when Equiano approaches George with religion in mind, he is attempting to foster the kind of fellowship he envisioned when he joined the Methodists. Second, Equiano represents cross-cultural alliances as intentional acts of intersubjectivity in response to the persistence of social alienation. This is no simple conversion tale. Nevertheless, Equiano fashions himself in
this text as a potential religious mentor to Prince George, and he appears to stratify his relationship to him by acting as his self-appointed instructor. Upon meeting George and learning a little bit about his background, as well as his experiences in London, he is “mortified in finding that they had not frequented any churches since they were here, nor was any attention paid to their morals” (203). His “mortification” that the four delegates’ spiritual lives were unattended to in England gives way to yet another criticism of the hypocrisy of Anglicans in general. He summarized these feelings by reflecting, “I was very sorry for this mock Christianity” (203). As a result, his maritime missionary project crystallizes. As a black, self-educated, ex-slave, he will attend to George’s spiritual growth.

This initial encounter brings together a complex series of details that make it difficult to characterize this relationship as either a simple conversion story or an intersubjective, cross-cultural alliance. Equiano’s missionary zeal resembles the trope of the enlightened, selfless Christian trying to enlighten the uncivilized, heathen Indian, supposedly for the latter’s benefit. According to this view, by converting George to Christianity, Equiano will be saving the soul of a man born to a barbarous people destined to an eternity in hell, and in the process, strengthening his own relationship to God. In support of this perspective, Field argues, “Equiano’s interactions with Prince George...clearly show Equiano’s movement from pagan primitive to converted European, a potential religious minister to Indian souls” (30). This criticism of Equiano possesses some merit. His rhetoric employs a paternalistic description of the Miskitu leaders, particularly George.
Another complicated detail centers on Equiano’s copy of Laurence Harlow’s *The Conversion of an Indian* (1774), which he carries with him on the ship. Carretta identifies it as a combination of the catechetical version of Thomas Wilson’s, *An Essay towards an Instruction for the Indians* (1740), and Harlow’s *Conversion*. However, this is not the first time Equiano mentions a version of this text in his *Narrative*. When he was first baptized, the local clergyman who performed the ceremony gave him a copy (78). He lost it, but the “old seafaring man” that he met in London gave him another, and this is the one he takes on board the *Morning Star* (185). In each instance, white Christians give Equiano a book written to convert Native Americans to Christianity, suggesting that as a black man he shares similarities with Native peoples. This supports Field’s arguments mentioned at the outset of this chapter. When she observes that he “bears a special resemblance” to Native Americans, “given his status as a recently ascended primitive” (17), she is calling attention to the simplistic ways that some Europeans equated Africans with Natives. Field argues that Equiano uses this opportunity as a way to reposition himself as a more enlightened Christian for his reading audiences. For Field, there is no alliance.

A third complicated detail involves the fact that according to historians, George had already been baptized on the Miskito coast two years before this encounter. According to Karl Offen, Reverend Thomas Warren of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel baptized George, his father (King George I), mother, and brothers in 1773 (347). This detail, unmentioned by Field, Carretta, or others who have written about this scene, provokes a series of questions about Equiano’s representation of George and George’s own Christian faith. Depending on George’s role in his baptism, and the degree
to which he understood and developed his Christian faith, he may have been more familiar with Christianity than Equiano makes him out to be. One way to explain this is to support Field’s point, which is that Equiano overlooks George’s Christian background in order to prop himself up as an evangelical missionary. Another explanation considers the differences between the SPG, the missionary branch of the Anglican Church, and Equiano’s version of Methodism. These differences may account for Equiano’s insistence on converting George in this scene. He is not simply evangelizing a pagan Indian. Rather he is hoping to transform a baptized Anglican Miskito prince into a Huntington Connexion Methodist.

Despite Equiano’s enthusiasm in this scene, and despite these complications, the Interesting Narrative also portrays their encounter as a cross-cultural alliance, albeit with fluctuating power dynamics. He reveals:

I made such progress with this youth, especially in religion, that when I used to go to bed at different hours of the night, if he was in his bed, he would get up on purpose to go to prayer with me, without any other clothes than his shirt; and before he would eat any of his meals amongst the gentlemen in the cabin, he would first come to me to pray, as he called it. (187)

In this quotation he maintains that George intentionally looks for him to pray before meals and bedtime. While Equiano does not say, perhaps this meant Bible reading, prayer recitation, or some combination of the two. Importantly, Equiano indicates that George has his own version of prayer, labeling it, “prayer as he called it.” George seems to possess his own idea of prayer, something other than what traditional Christian Methodists in the eighteenth century would have recognized. Equiano does not correct George, nor does he attempt to change his ways. Thus, “prayer” represents a fluid
exchange of spiritual conversation in the intimate confines of a ship. Resembling the dialogues Equiano shared with Baker, Queen, and the “old seafaring man” in London, this prayer indicates the fragile presence of a two-way recognition of intersubjectivity.

One of the differences between Equiano’s bonds with Baker and Queen and his alliance with George involves the fact that while neither of them is a slave, they each possess a certain level of vulnerability. As men of color traveling along the circum-Atlantic in the eighteenth-century, they live with certain levels of fear and insecurity. Even as free men, the laws of colonialism dictate that domination and surveillance are ubiquitous facts of daily life. Their vulnerability heightens as the ship slowly moves away from London and toward its destination in Central America. For example, if privateers attacked the *Morning Star* as they passed through the West Indies, or if certain colonial agents were able to deceptively isolate and capture both or one of them while on a temporary stop in Jamaica, each man could find himself enslaved (or in Equiano’s case, re-enslaved). As readers will soon discover, Equiano will experience the menacing reality of this vulnerability shortly after arriving in Mosquitia when he is threatened with the prospects of re-enslavement by a corrupt British maritime captain.

Other dimensions of George’s cultural background accentuate reasons for a cross-cultural alliance with Equiano. Approximately eighteen years of age and known among his people as “Young George,” he was the son of King George I, who had been ruler of the Sambo-Miskituc since 1755 (Olien 211). The young Prince was destined to assume leadership of the Sambo upon his father’s death and would do exactly that by 1777. He

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47 According to Olien, English-based primary sources have attributed the authority of the Miskitu to English power in the region. However, he argues, these claims should be met with caution and skepticism, for they fail to account for how the Miskitu themselves historically felt about these titles.
had traveled to London with his Uncle, Duke Isaac, and two local Natives, and the four men were returning to their homeland, with Irving representing the Crown’s official escort. Both Prince George and Duke Isaac were members of the Sambo-Miskitu tribe—a Black-Native community of immense power and influence on the northern Miskito Coast. The Sambo were descendants of the mixing of local Miskitu natives and shipwrecked slaves. Although scholars do not know exactly when the alliance between marooned African slaves and the Miskitu began, one theory suggests it originated in 1641, when a slave ship of either Portuguese or Spanish origin bound for Cartagena shipwrecked off the coast of Cape Gracias a Dios (Offen “Blacks and Blackness” 95).48 According to the story, the slaves took advantage of the wreck by collectively swimming to shore and fleeing into the local jungle. Local Miskitu natives welcomed them and after decades of intermarriage, the syncretic community became known to European colonists and others as the Sambo-Miskitu. Between 1641 and 1775, they controlled the northeastern Miskito Coast and expanded their power. They were related to, but separate from, the Tawira-Miskitu, who occupied the southern Miskito Coast and who tended to ally with Spain. Both groups had developed reputations as fierce fighting forces resistant to European colonialism. Equiano writes, “they particularly boast of having never been conquered by the Spaniards” (207). What he does not mention is that they probably also boasted about their resistance to British colonialism. Nevertheless, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were willing, if cautious, trade partners with both Spanish and English merchants. By the late eighteenth century, their loyalties were

48 The history of this event is shrouded in conflicting historical accounts, many of which reflect British or Spanish bias. For a more succinct overview, including an explanation of the ambiguous historical evidence, see Offen, “Blacks and Blackness,” 96.
more in favor of the English, which helps explain their openness to Irving’s plantation.

In 1775, the year the two men are traveling aboard the ship, the Miskitu own a reputation based on their hospitality to marooned slaves, a characteristic that will eventually serve Equiano well. Unbeknownst to Equiano this may have been one reason why George took an interest in him from the beginning.49

I offer this background to make the argument that George pursues an alliance with Equiano because of their potentially similar vulnerable positions in relation to dominant British and Spanish imperialists. Although George never experienced slavery, as a leader of his people he fully understood the fragile political position they occupied on the Shore. As a Sambo-Miskitu born into a tense and contested coastal region, George likely witnessed his share of atrocities at the hands of English and Spanish explorers, missionaries, colonists, traders and settlers. These stories may also have found their way into his conversation with Equiano. As Spain and England competed for land and resources, they did so by simultaneously allying with and attacking the local Miskitu groups. In addition, the English had a long-standing practice of enslaving Tawira-Miskitu men and women and shipping them off to slave markets throughout the West.

49 Despite the fluid mixing of groups, historians believe that to some degree one part of the Miskitu people remained more isolated from African-intermixture. On the southern shore, the Tawira-Miskitu remained more culturally isolated, less powerful, and mixed more infrequently than the Sambo (Offen “Sambo and Tawira”). As Offen notes, for the most part, the Sambo and the Tawira remained politically, economically and culturally connected, although by the 1770s the Sambo allied more with the British, while the Tawira partnered with the Spanish (“Sambo and Tawira”). He explains, “While new racial categories and ideologies helped divide the Mosquito people, both the Sambo and Tawira often referred to themselves as “a nation of Mosquitomen” (93). The Miskitu are two different, but politically connected, groups with their own leadership, political agendas and spheres of influence. Because the Sambo and the Tawira recognized the fierce imperial competition between Britain and Spain, they often used this antagonism as a way to leverage their own power and trading opportunities with respective European powers. For nearly two centuries, the Sambo and Tawira resisted both British and Spanish imperialism, yet remained open to trade through the development of strategic political alliances and economic bartering.
Indies. Protesting this practice was one of the reasons Prince George and his delegation traveled to London in the first place.50

This historical context suggests that George’s black-Native ancestry and culturally syncretic background, as well as his own concerns about European colonialism, suggest that despite their cultural differences, they shared some common traits, and possibly similar political views on the encroachment of European imperialists and slave traffickers. Equiano includes one detail that provides insight into some of what they may have discussed. He reveals that George loves talking about the woodcut illustrations in Equiano’s copy of John Foxe’s Book of Martyrs: “He used to be fond of looking into it and would ask many questions about the papal cruelties he saw depicted there, and which I explained to him” (203). A pro-Reformation Protestant text originally published in 1563, Martyrs is an enormous volume that recounts the suffering of all Christian martyrs, but particularly those who adopted Protestantism during the reign of Mary I (1516-1558) and were subsequently tortured and killed for abandoning Catholicism. According to

50 Although historical scholarship varies widely on the reasons why the delegation went to London, Karl Offen and Jennifer Anders provide the most contextualized background for supporting a point that seems shrouded in conflicted reports and political bias. According to Offen, in 1775, Prince George’s father, King George I, proactively responded to what he felt were troubling developments on the shore. One major development included evidence of a growing Tawira-Miskitu political affiliation with the Spanish (Readers may remember the Tawira-Miskitu were the more “native,” less powerful tribe of Miskitu who occupied the southern coastline). Fearing a Tawira-Spanish alliance would threaten his power on the coast, George I responded by issuing a large land grant that became known in British circles as the “Albera Poyer project.” He issued land grants in Tawira territory to British settlers looking to expand their own plantations. By granting the land claim on Tawira territory, the King was opening hostilities against both the Tawira and the Spanish. He was doing so, however, to strengthen Sambo alliances with the British. The King’s other move was to send his son, Prince George, his brother, Duke Isaac, and two Ulwa Indians named Richard and John to England to complain to the King about British practice of capturing and selling Tawira Indians into the West Indies slave trade. Although the King felt certain hostilities toward the less powerful Tawira, he insisted that the British should be held to the 1741 legal restriction on Indian slavery on the coast. Offen quotes a letter written by King George to the Earl of Dartmouth on Nov. 10, 1775, suggesting the four men were in London “for the purpose of laying before his Majesty’s ministers some representations and complaints [regarding] the conduct of the [Indian slave] trade” (qtd. in Offen “Sambo and Tawira” 350). Apparently, the King received his wish as Offen elaborates, “The king’s effort to end Tawira slaving led to a new law nullifying the sale of Indian slaves after October 1776 and requiring owners to free their Indian slaves by 1 March 1777” (Offen “Sambo and Tawira 350).
Linda Colley, the book was revived and circulated in the late eighteenth century with an eye toward Britain’s imperial competitions with both France and Spain, with new editions published in 1761 and 1776 (Colley 26). While a superficial reading of this scene may conclude that Equiano is using a traditional religious text to evangelize a young Indian whom he supposedly views as uncivilized, the fact that they read Foxe’s Book of Martyrs suggests a more complex discussion of Christianity and resistance to colonialism may have been the topic of many conversations. As Daniel O’Quinn observes, Equiano was carrying one of the newer abridged versions that approached the subject of “papal cruelties” for a more contemporary audience (268).51 William Haller explains that this edition of the text offers “a strongly oppositional identity, an identity founded on suffering and resistance and profoundly antithetical to the hierarchical order of the English state” (qtd. in O’Quinn 268).52

That the two men were reading an abridged version written for an eighteenth century audience provides insight into how they may have used a literary text (and Christian teachings) to bond over somewhat similar experiences of exploitation and marginalization. The illustrations included in this version are particularly graphic, depicting scenes of torture and torment that were eerily similar to those experienced by slaves and Native peoples throughout North America and the Caribbean. This analysis requires a leap into the silences or absences of their conversation not provided by Equiano’s narration. It requires imagining the private moments of reading and discussing Foxe’s Martyrs. As they slowly turned the pages, peering over the graphic illustrations

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51 The full title of this edition is The Book of Martyrs: Containing an Account of the Sufferings and Death of the Protestants in the Reign of Mary the First. Illustrated with Copper Plates. Originally Written by Mr John Fox; And now Revised and Corrected with a Recommendary Preface by the Revd: Mr: Madan.
of torture and death, what exactly did they discuss? What questions did George ask? What was he “fond” of? Did the two men draw specific parallels between the religious torture of British subjects and the persecution and violent enslavement of African and Native peoples across North America? Did they find resemblances between illustrations of Christian torture in the name of God and missionary trips to the West Indies or the Mosquito Coast? Did they pinpoint the similarities between religious domination and their own personal experiences with British (and Spanish) colonialism? Because Martyrs documents the treatment of oppressed non-Anglicans, we might question whether these two men discussed and debated the limitations of any Christian ideology that could dehumanize non-Christian Others. Did they talk about Christianity’s hypocritical stance on slavery and the treatment of non-Christian peoples, which was obviously an important topic to Equiano?

Reading to understand how intimate exchanges give meaning to cross-cultural encounters requires attentiveness to the subtleties of a text. Writing on the importance of reading so-called minor events in subaltern texts, Laura Ann Stoler argues for a new way of reading to better understand how the marginalized confronted and responded to colonialism:

Treating governance through the microphysics of daily lives has...changed how we read – for discrepant tone, tacit knowledge, stray emotions, extravagant details, ‘minor’ events. These elements can index how people made sense of these colonial conditions, what they successfully navigated or failed to maneuver. (7)

As Stoler suggests, this is exactly the kind of reading that is necessary to understand what two very different men found so compelling about a sixteenth century treatise on Christian martyrdom. Moreover, some of their dialogue may have extended to cover
mutual experiences of hardship and violence. Equiano may have shared personal anecdotes and feelings about his experiences as a slave crisscrossing the Atlantic. He could have expressed the intimate experiences of torture, fear, doubt, desperation, and loneliness. Certainly he could have opened up about many of the anecdotes and experiences he eventually would use in his *Interesting Narrative*. From George’s perspective, had he lost members of his family or community to British slavery? Did he experience loss, separation or death because of colonial legal policies or military attacks from the British or Spanish?

Equiano and George do not share skin color or what Hartman calls the “centrality of racial identity or the selfsameness or transparency of blackness” (59). Obviously, neither Equiano nor George is a slave at this time. Furthermore, although George possesses a bi-racial identity as a member of the Sambo-Miskito, Equiano does not imply that they share a black identity. At one point George characterizes Equiano as “white” when he asks, “How comes it that all the white men on board, who can read and write, observe the sun and know all things, yet swear, lie, and get drunk, only excepting yourself?” (204). George’s surprising classification of Equiano as “white” implies an understanding of racial formation based more on religion and literacy than on skin color itself. As mentioned in the introduction to the dissertation, this fits with Hartman’s arguments for “networks of affiliation,” in which community “cannot be reduced to race ‘a priori’” (59). Instead, she finds that affiliation emerges out of the “very purposeful and self-conscious effort to build community” (59). This is the essence of my analysis in this scene. What brings these two men together is a mutual interest in building an alliance,
not racial sameness. It is the reciprocal need for connection that binds these two men, even though a variety of inconsistencies and tensions characterize that bond.

According to the text, tensions and contradictions actually disable the relationship. Before the ship arrives in Mosquitia, sailors and others on the voyage begin to mock George for befriending Equiano. In response, Equiano vents his emotions when he realizes “devices of Satan” and “sons of Belial” threaten their connection (204). Equiano is frustrated when they “began to ask him whether I had converted him to Christianity, laughed, and made their jest at him” (203). George’s response to these sailors indicates just how important this relationship has been to Equiano: “They teazed the poor innocent youth, so that he would not learn his book any more!” (203). Sadly, this “grieved me very much” (204). Here we see Equiano as a rejected, downtrodden figure, as opposed to the confident Christian evangelical just a few paragraphs earlier. It is clear the relationship meant something to him, and the thought of its fracture upsets him greatly. For Equiano, this “grief” may be yet another tale of disconnection and separation that characterizes his experiences in the Atlantic world. However, instead of losing a meaningful connection due to slavery, he has lost it because of the mockery of the sailors and crewmembers that he probably knew well. Suddenly, each man finds himself in a delicate and vulnerable position vis-à-vis each other as well as the other passengers and crew. Equiano reveals his desperation in his plea to George: “I endeavoured to persuade him as well as I could, but he would not come; and entreated him very much to tell me his reasons for acting thus” (204). George’s response also reveals that he finds himself in a relational dilemma. “He would not drink nor carouse with these ungodly actors, nor would he be with me, even at prayers” (204). George’s
response is to withdraw from Equiano in order to avoid the mockery of the sailors. He has also decided to avoid Equiano and to discontinue their conversations and prayer sessions. George chooses not to pick sides in an attempt to preserve relationships with both parties.

In this scene, Equiano’s strict adherence to Methodism exposes the limits of his faith as a transformative model of cross-cultural alliances. Rather than allowing him to resolve this conflict and maintain his alliance, his insistence on Methodism backs him into a corner from which he cannot recover. Equiano’s desperation peaks when he uses his rhetorical skills to place George in an ethical dilemma. After George asks Equiano why he is the only one on the ship who practices Christianity, Equiano responds by telling George that it is better to practice Methodism alone than to violate its principles and sin in community with others. Surprisingly, when put in this vulnerable position Equiano appears to give George a take-it-or-leave-it proposition. George’s response is revealing: “He replied, that if these persons went to hell he would go also” (204). This dilemma reveals that relationships always exist in context and involve others in a network of overlapping connections. George realizes that his bond with Equiano will force him to sever connections with other potential intimate, non-Methodist networks. In essence, he ultimately sacrifices a relationship with Equiano for relations with others. From this perspective, George has something to teach Equiano, who is unable to prioritize this bond over his devotion to his beliefs. From the start, their cross-cultural alliance offered new possibilities and temporarily interrupted their respective experiences of dehumanization in the colonial world. It ended with a clash of cultural difference and Equiano’s stubborn
persistence to prioritize his own religious practice. This time, his alienation was his responsibility.

**Finding Sanctuary in the Miskitu Network**

After more than two months at sea the *Morning Star* left behind the harsh Atlantic currents and entered the warm, tranquil, turquoise waters of the Caribbean Ocean. After a brief detour in Kingston, Jamaica, during which Irving and Equiano bought supplies and purchased slaves for the plantation, they set sail for the weeklong trip to the Miskito Coast. They arrived on February in the northern coastal territory controlled by the Sambo-Miskitu. Here, George and his party “took affectionate leave of us” and “we never saw one of them afterwards” (189). From this point forward, the *Interesting Narrative* assumes what some scholars have called an ethnographic voice indicative of the travel narrative. Equiano describes flora and fauna, observes the cultural practices and beliefs of the Sambo, and describes his general relations during his four-month stay on the coast. However, one very clear and important factor emerges in Equiano’s descriptions of his time there; the relational fallout with George was not an obstacle to his welcome among the Sambo. During the four months Equiano spent on the coast, he was able to successfully establish positive cross-cultural relations with the people, especially the local leaders.

The Miskito Shore in 1775 fits the definition of a contact zone in the circum-Atlantic. It represented an ambiguous space of hybrid encounters between a variety of individuals and groups who promoted and resisted colonization and empire. To examine the Miskito Coast in this era is to see both the British and Spanish quest for empire as a
project in formation, rather than as a fixed, pre-ordained accomplishment. It accommodates the mixing of Africans and Native peoples who attempt to use these contact zones for their own political purposes. Adelman and Aron summarize: “Equally important to the history of borderlands and frontiers were the ways in which Indians exploited these differences and compelled these shifts, partly to resist submission but mainly to negotiate intercultural relations on terms more to their liking.”

One of the differences between Equiano’s narration of his experience in Mosquitia and Hammon’s encounters in Florida is that Hammon provides few details about his day-to-day activities. In contrast, Equiano provides a series of positive observations and negative reflections on the Miskitu and his contact with them. His criticisms of the Miskitu include their propensity for consuming alcohol and their resistance to Christian worship. Ceremonies including alcohol consumption lead to conflicts, and he observes one heated exchange among leaders that escalates to the degree that Dr. Irving flees the ceremony for his safety. Equiano remains to try settle the dispute. He thinks of a “strategem to appease the riot,” and his tactic involves appropriating Columbus’ use of the Bible to terrify the Taino Indians of Hispaniola into subjection. Equiano writes, “I had read in the life of Columbus...where on some occasion, he frightened them, by telling them of certain events in the heavens, I had recourse to the same expedient, and it succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectations” (208). He points to the sky, tells them that “God lived there,” and “that he was angry with them, and they must not quarrel so; that they were all brothers, and if they did not leave off, and go away quietly, I would take the book, read, and tell God to make them dead” (208). This problematic revelation finds him using literary and Christian tools as
weapons of authority intended to pacify the Miskitu. However, despite this troubling parallel, there are differences between Equiano and Columbus in this scene. Rather than using this power to subdue and enslave the Miskitu, he is trying to stop a violent argument and remind them that they “are all brothers.” In this way, he represents himself as a Christian peacemaker, rather than a domineering conquistador.

He juxtaposes this scene with multi-layered remarks on the communally oriented lifeways of the Miskitu. This allows him to draw connections between the Miskitu and the Igbo. On the one hand, he depicts them as simplistic, pointing out that they “were so simple in their manners” (206). Although he “never saw any mode of worship among them,” they were “not worse than their European brethren or neighbours, for I am sorry to say that there was not one white person...that was better or more pious than those unenlightened Indians” (206). This backhanded compliment simultaneously praises the Miskitu for their ethical lifeways and criticizes them as insufficiently Christian in practice. This larger point, however is not to denigrate the Miskitu so much as to fault Anglo-Europeans for their own inadequate implementation of Christianity. However, in other commentary Equiano praises the Miskitu for their devotion to the common good. They build houses “exactly like the Africans,” which is a reference to his earlier point that Igboland is a place “where everyone contributes something to the common stock” (38). By comparing the Igbo to the Miskitu, Equiano comes full circle in his praise of the Igbo’s intersubjective cultural foundations. The Miskitu also adopt these ways, which characterizes them as culturally superior to Anglo-Christians. For Equiano, the Shore is not quite home in the sense that he does not stay long enough or feel culturally connected
enough to want to permanently settle there. Nevertheless, it is a place where “some of the Indians knew me, and received me kindly” (213).

By June of 1776, after only four months on the coast, Equiano began to prepare for departure. As scholars have already discussed, the plantation was doomed to fail from the beginning (Carretta; Lovejoy “Alternatives”). Generally, bad weather, Spanish military incursions, and Miskitu resistance to total British presence on the coast were three major factors in its demise. Equiano appeals to Irving, who writes Equiano a “certificate” recommending him for further service abroad. Taking leave of the Miskito shore, he heads for Jamaica. He finds what appears to be a wage-paying job on a sloop owned by a man named “Hughes.” Unfortunately for Equiano, Hughes does not like Christians, nor does he think blacks should speak their minds or move freely across the West Indies. After a brief discussion on the destination of the sloop and Equiano’s job as seaman, Hughes begins to question Equiano’s emancipation status: “He then immediately changed his tone, and swore, and abused me very much, and asked how I came to be freed” (211). When Equiano explains that Dr. Irving could speak on his behalf, Hughes, who knows Irving, refuses to listen: “This account was of no use; he still swore exceedingly at me, and cursed the master for a fool that sold me my freedom, and the doctor for another in letting me go from him” (211). When Equiano realizes the situation is escalating and his powerlessness is becoming more apparent, he asks off the ship. Hughes will not hear of it. Equiano responds with a painful shot at Hughes and, more generally, English Christians, when he once again compares them unfavorably to Muslim Turks: “I said I had been twice amongst the Turks, yet had never seen any such usage with them, and much less could I have expected any thing of this kind amongst
Christians” (211). With this response, Equiano’s rhetorical strategy highlights earlier beliefs that non-Christian British subjects have much to learn about “neighborly” treatment of blacks from Muslim Turks and “true” Christians. Unfortunately, this strategy backfires badly.

Hughes mocks Equiano’s Christianity, declaring that the only way he is going to leave the ship is if he can, like Jesus, “walk upon the water to the shore” (211). Immediately, Hughes has the vulnerable black mariner bound and tied and hung upside down on the deck. Equiano laments, “Thus I hung, without any crime committed, and without judge or jury; merely because I was a free man, and could not by the law get any redress from a white person in those parts of the world” (194). Equiano reveals, “I was in great pain from my situation, and cried and begged very hard for some mercy; but all in vain” (194). Equiano’s tears only infuriate Hughes, who threatens more violence, “My tyrant, in a great rage, brought a musquet out of the cabin, and loaded it before me and the crew, and swore that he would shoot me if I cried any more. I had now no alternative; I therefore remained silent, seeing not one white man on board who said a word on my behalf” (194). Among white sailors, some of whom he knows, Equiano is a stranger with no sense of community. The ubiquitous threat of terror and re-en slavement has once again arisen and reminded him of his powerlessness and social isolation. It also highlights the systematic exploitation and brutal violence that free men of color could be subjected to in this part of the Caribbean. The fact that he has found himself a tortured victim of a British trader evokes his earlier discussions with George on Foxe’s Book of Martyrs. His description of his own torture somewhat resembles the images and descriptions he read about with George on the transatlantic voyage. It is almost as if he
has once again become a secular martyr of British colonial slave policies. Bound, tied, and hung upside down, he appears to be experiencing his own version of a maritime crucifixion.

However, he finds relief and human recognition from those least in the position to offer it—Hughes’ own slaves. Around one o’clock in the morning, when the captain and Hughes are fast asleep below deck, Equiano “begged some of his slaves to slack the rope that was round my body, that my feet might rest on something. This they did at the risk of being cruelly used by their master, who beat some of them severely at first for not tying me when he commanded them” (212). Apparently, slacking the rope was the second act of benevolence extended to Equiano by anonymous slaves whom he had never met before. Earlier in the day they had openly defied Hughes and experienced their own physical punishment by refusing to participate in Equiano’s torture. These slaves are willing to sacrifice their own safety to aid Equiano in his time of need. This clandestine generosity represents an act of intersubjective agency. At great risk to their own safety, they release him from captivity and initiate his freedom.

Exploring this scene from Equiano’s Methodist perspective, it is as if he is the victim in his own maritime version of the “good Samaritan” story. Appearing in Luke’s Gospel in the New Testament, the story details Jesus’ parable of the man who is beaten, robbed and left for dead on the side of the road by thieves. In Equiano’s case, while the white men aboard the ship witness and ignore Equiano’s suffering, it is the slaves with the most to lose who come to his aid. Like the Samaritan in the parable, these slaves seem to possess what Hughes and his men do not—an ability to recognize Equiano’s humanness and prioritize alleviation of his suffering, regardless of the cost. Regarding
the anonymous slaves’ selfless acts of kindness toward Equiano, these are the examples of neighborly affiliation that demonstrate his most powerful Christian and anti-slavery message. These tiny acts of kindness rarely register in critical examinations of Equiano’s text. However, they provide unique insight into the daily acts of human fellowship attempted under the shadow of debasement and death. They certainly afforded Equiano some meaningful, almost incalculable physical and psychological relief in the moment.

The slaves that rescue him use acts of generosity to resist their own sense of chattel conditioned by slavery. In other words, clandestine acts of kindness, however temporary, empower those understood to be chattel while simultaneously rendering subjectivity on those who have been characterized as commodified objects. As Smallwood points out, while slaves were “menaced” with social death: “At every point along the passage from African to New World markets, we find a stark contest between slave traders and slaves, between the traders’ will to commodify people and the captives' will to remain fully recognizable as human subjects” (5). In this scene the Golden Rule becomes a tactic of the oppressed to humanize themselves as well as their fellow slaves (or ex-slaves) in need.

As this chapter demonstrates, such acts of selflessness were not limited to interactions among black slaves. After Equiano is able to escape from the ship the next day, he makes his way to shore and searches for sanctuary among the Miskitu network of affiliations. He finds his way to a Tawira-Miskitu village where “some of the Indians knew me, and received me kindly” (196). These Tawiras lived on the southernmost part

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53 Readers may remember the Tawira were the group of Miskitu people who lived in the southernmost area of the district. It was British enslavement of the Tawira-Miskitu that caused King George to send his son
of King George’s land and were lead by the “Admiral”. Equiano describes his meeting with the Admiral as a welcome and hospitable one: “He was glad to see me, and refreshed me with such things as the place afforded; and I had a hammock to sleep in” (196). Here, he contrasts the tyranny of Hughes and his men with the innate generosity of the Tawira-Miskitu. Equiano highlights this contrast when he concludes, “They acted towards me more like the Christians than those whites I was amongst last night, though they had been baptized” (196). The intersubjective recognition afforded by the Miskitu fits Equiano’s consistent message in the text. He continues to laud the Christian-like values and morals of those assumed to be inferior. After his torture, temporary re-enslavement and near-death experience, these people do not turn him over to the English, even though they could have in order to strengthen their own ties with the Crown’s authorities in the region. Instead, they attend to his physical needs and comfort him during an episode of great fear and suffering without any real calculable gain for themselves.

As mentioned, the Miskito Coast had already acquired a reputation as a place where slaves escaped and rebelled more regularly than in other British territories and colonies. Equiano finds the Miskitu willing to help him escape and find passage on another boat. Various scholars researching the complicated history of slavery on Mosquitia in the eighteenth century have identified a number of factors regarding why slaves were able to flee British plantations and settlements on the Shore. Some, including slaves’ extensive knowledge of terrain, experience with transportation methods and other delegates to protest this act to London. At the time of Equiano’s presence on the coast they were outnumbered by the Sambo approximately 2:1 and were beholden to Sambo authority.

54 The Admiral kept his home at Pearl Lagoon on the southern coast.
(including boating), and skill with firearms, were reflections of the fact that slave owners were isolated, vulnerable to attacks by Spanish and indigenous groups (including the Miskitu) and were forced to train slaves (Goett 140-150). In addition, the Spanish issued edicts as tactics to disrupt British influence in the region. These edicts granted amnesty to British-owned escaped slaves (willing to convert to Catholicism). They intended to disrupt settlement efforts and economic stability. Escaped slaves also posed a military threat to the English, for escaped slaves often fought for the Spanish against the British once they were granted their freedom.  

Equiano’s escape occurred during a time when slaves were escaping in large numbers. In November of 1775, around the time the *Morning Star* was still docked in London, a large number of slaves escaped from the Black River region (located just north of Cape Gracias a Dios (Rogers 129-130). Apparently, they fled after losing a legal claim to freedom (Rogers 130). In August of 1776, shortly after Equiano left, slave desertions reached such high numbers that British regional superintendent James Lawrie placed the territory under martial law. Lawrie declared, “we are in continual danger of an Insurrection among even our own Slaves” (qtd. in Rogers 130). For their own protection, the remaining settlers were evacuated to a nearby island (130). Some escaping slaves fled to Spanish territory. Others created their own settlement communities away from the coast in the wilderness. Some went north to Belize and joined the multi-ethnic crews of lumberjacks, loggers and pirates who operated somewhat successfully outside of British authority. Others, like Equiano, found temporary safe havens or even permanent

55 More extensive discussions on the complex nature of slave relations in the region can be found in Bolland, Naylor, Offen, Goett, and Lovejoy.
residences among local indigenous peoples. In this scene he is able to rely on an already successful network of black-Native networks and alliances that openly defied British colonial authority.

From this point in his account Equiano details how the Admiral assists him in finding safer passage to Jamaica by sending with him a group of five “able Indians” on a fifty-mile trip southward along the coast. On this trip Equiano relies on his delegation’s mastery of local networks and geographical terrain to navigate him through dangerous territory before they arrive at a small port, where he secures passage on a sloop destined for Jamaica. The Admiral welcomes Equiano and assists in his escape because it is likely that he had already met Equiano at some point in the previous four months. Equiano’s diplomatic skills and ability to cultivate cross-cultural affiliations during earlier meetings may have paved the way for his reception as a refugee. During his extended stay on the Miskito Shore, Equiano participated in cultural events and rituals, and, according to his text, earned a general level of respect that may have led to the Admiral’s reciprocal treatment at this time. In earning this respect, he was unwittingly laying the foundation for his own sanctuary and survival.

**Sowing the Seeds of Connection**

In November of 1775, Olaudah Equiano set out on yet another transatlantic venture. Unlike the others, however, on this trip he fashioned a unique bond with a young Miskito prince. While some scholars have interpreted this scene as Equiano’s straightforward attempt to convert George to Christianity, I argue that it reflects a deeper need for cross-cultural intersubjectivity. The roots of this intersubjectivity run deep in his
Narrative, through his quotidian maritime friendships and back to his representations of African life among the Igbo.

This analysis interrupts a wide body of scholarship that takes for granted Equiano’s self-fashioning of an individual, entrepreneurial identity. Instead, it places his transnational movements in concert with ongoing attempts to recreate intersubjectivity in the face of subjection. Intersubjectivity in this text manifests as two-way dialogue between and among marginalized figures living on the perimeter of the eighteenth-century Atlantic. Conversation, in this sense, is a marker of recognition, of openness to the influence of others. It helps Equiano see himself as belonging in the world of human beings at a time and place in which many Anglo-Christians rarely granted black men this right. Earlier in this chapter, I cited the work of Joanna Brooks, who argues for religious conversion as a “venue for creative and political agency” among people of color at this time (18). She also draws upon the work of postcolonial scholar Gauri Visnawathan to argue that people of color used writing to challenge the “ascendant secularization and rationalization” of the late eighteenth century” (18). This critique provides the context for my own reading of Equiano as a communally oriented intersubject, rather than a rugged individual. As Nicole Tonkovich observes, this supposed self-fashioning of Equiano’s entrepreneurial identity, along with the Interesting Narrative’s consistent inclusion in early American literary anthologies calls attention to “selective attributions of American identity” (253). Her argument suggests that if we uncritically accept this text as a precursor to the Horatio Alger stories of the late nineteenth century, we overlook the master narratives of liberalism and gender at work in the “canon of entrepreneurial American identity” (254). Celebrating liberal success stories can be problematic when
the notion of the liberal individual is so closely intertwined with white manhood, especially when white manhood was, in Hegelian terms, posited as the negation of black subjectivity. By exploring the intersubjective dimensions of Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*, or rather, what might be called the intersubjective-fashioning of his identity, this chapter questions these assumptions.

While I do not discount the importance or relevance of Equiano’s individualism, it still does not follow logically that he responded to social death by *only* pursuing self-reliant interests. I have argued that the *Interesting Narrative* provides evidence that fellowship in the form of interpersonal dialogue and reciprocal exchange represents his primary motivations in pursuing a formal adoption of Methodism. From the hyper-individualist perspective, the need for fellowship may show evidence of a weak dependence on others. According to this line of thinking, it reflects his inability to autonomously solve his own problems. In other words, this is an indication of an undeveloped sense of individualism. However, Brooks’ analysis of religious discourses in Black Atlantic texts contextualizes my arguments for an intersubjective reading of Equiano. She argues, “Our challenge in the field of early American minority literatures is to recognize that differences in content, shape, and texture, which have been read as markers of ‘inadequacy,’ are in fact elements of signification” (12). In other words, it may be possible to perceive Equiano’s desire for reciprocal conversation as a strength of his character, rather than a weakness. This, I argue, is exactly what Equiano’s search for Christian fellowship underscores. In this chapter, intersubjectivity is an imperfect process and a dynamic, more than an actualized achievement. Full of contradictions and tensions, Equiano’s search for intersubjectivity temporarily relieves him of the burdens of
subjection. However, it rarely lasts. In some cases, as with his alliance with George, the dismantling of intersubjective relations exposes the limits of Methodism in bridging cross-cultural divisions.

As Equiano himself declared before the trip even began, he set out to “sow the good seed” for the “harvest was ripe in those parts” (203). “Seed sowing” metaphors are abundant in the Christian Bible. In particular, the parable of the “sower” occurs repeatedly in the New Testament. According to the story, Jesus recounts how a sower planted many seeds in a field. Birds ate some of these seeds, while others died in the hot sun. Some were caught in thorny bushes and were never given a chance to grow. According to Luke’s version in Chapter 8, verses 4-15, when the crowds listening to the story asked for its meaning, Jesus of Nazareth replied, “The seed is the word of God.” The “word of God” in this parable symbolizes the Christian message, and for Equiano, no teaching better encapsulates “the word” than the Golden Rule. As this chapter has discussed, Christian teachings are part of a larger sense of relationship and resistance for Equiano, and they provide a useful way to understand how oppressed, vulnerable Black Atlantic writers often reconfigured Christian teachings to serve their own needs. Equiano sought out Methodism because of its opportunity for fellowship, and if he practiced and attempted to spread Methodism with the goal of creating a deeper sense of belonging to others, then his “sowing” metaphor symbolizes the intersubjective fellowship he sought to create on the transatlantic. For those possessing a very limited amount of power in the eighteenth century Black Atlantic, sowing the seeds of connection could provide a liberating experience of personhood.
Chapter Three

Paul Cuffe’s Friendly Society in Sierra Leone

Where is the human being that can picture to himself this scene of woe, without at the same time execrating a trade which spreads misery and desolation wherever it appears? Where is the man of real benevolence, who will not join heart and hand, in opposing this barbarous, this iniquitous traffic?

-Matthew Carey

I meet With the inhabittance of the Colony at James Reeds at which meeting it Was agreed unto that there Should be a Monthly Meeting held by this Society. Which Society Should be Called the Friendly Society of Sierra Leona Whose Duty it Should be to take Every Matter into their Care that appeared to be for the Beneficial good of the universe and to the glory of God...

-Paul Cuffe

In December of 1811, Paul Cuffe, the black-Native ship captain and merchant from Massachusetts, met with a downtrodden group of settlers in the British colony of Sierra Leone, Africa. Together they created a formal economic coalition dedicated to their mutual empowerment. Their membership included a culturally and religiously diverse group of ex-slaves and free blacks, many of whom had escaped persecution in the southern U.S. colonies during the American Revolution by pledging loyalty to the British. Several Jamaican Maroons, exiled by British forces from the West Indies before the turn of the century, also constituted membership in the assembly. In conjunction with community leaders, Cuffe attempted to collectively empower the settlers to challenge local white authorities. The colonial government, backed by the Crown, had systematically disenfranchised and alienated settlers since they first arrived in 1792. It placed a stranglehold on black businesses and kept many settlers in a state approximating

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56 This quote can be found in Carey 429.
indentured servitude. Agreeing to minimize their denominational differences in favor of economic and political solidarity, the settlers called themselves the Friendly Society of Sierra Leone.

In the short term, Cuffe believed the Society could become a black cooperative trading coalition that could potentially alleviate the settlers’ desperate economic conditions. In practical terms, they committed to private property ownership, maritime navigation and whaling, agricultural development, and manufacturing. Armed with these skills, they would enter into what Cuffe called “circular” trade with other African benevolent societies in the United States (Wiggins 433-435). They remained devoted to their respective denominations, but channeled their spiritual practices toward collective prosperity. They agreed to work closely with the African Institute, a British antislavery organization that provided political and financial oversight of the settlers, despite the Institute’s recent failure to address the settlers’ complaints. Over time, Cuffe hoped the Friendly Society’s success in Sierra Leone might also attract slaves and free blacks in the U.S. He idealized that some might consider relocating to a place where they could pursue political and economic freedom without the burdens of slavery and institutional racism. In his vision, the Society represented a beacon of economic justice for all exploited blacks throughout the Atlantic World.

Cuffe formulated an economic plan for the Friendly Society that in theory would directly oppose racialized forms of capitalism practiced and enforced by a series of governors and trading firms and sanctioned by the British government. This structural exploitation precluded black subjects from equally and freely exchanging goods and labor in the local marketplace. He represented this plan as a cross-cultural,
intersubjective alliance of disempowered people of color. It combined the practices he
learned from his Native background, his maritime experiences at sea, and his spiritual
roots and personal connections in Quaker benevolent societies. He generated an image of
a diasporic African identity for himself and the Friendly Society that subordinated and
excluded native Africans. To put his plan into action, and to challenge the racially
codified trade market, he endorsed a form of liberal capitalism that prioritized the
exchange of goods and resources among local citizens, as well as other black benevolent
societies and abolitionist groups situated along the Atlantic perimeter. This form of
capitalism, rather than abstracting subjectivity to the individual, embedded it within a
spirit of intersubjective community. He believed that sentimental benevolence, guided by
Christianity prioritizing the common good, could maintain the Friendly Society’s spirit of
reciprocity. On a local level, this plan offered an organized and unified resistance to the
institutionalized exploitation of the Friendly Society members. Globally, it promised to
unite other similarly situated black communities. Long term, he believed it could
contribute to the abolition of the slave trade.

In recent scholarship, Cuffe’s life and writings represent a provocative figure of
black maritime mobility, enterprise, and political activism. W. Jeffrey Bolster has cited
him as a groundbreaking economic pioneer for owning and operating his own ships and
relying solely on men of color to develop his circum-Atlantic mercantile business (“Black
Sailors” 437). Some writers have cited him in larger studies of early pan-African and
Black Nationalist movements seeking to unite oppressed blacks around the Atlantic rim
(Campbell; Sidbury). Still others argue that he was an unabashed promoter of liberal
capitalism and a self-made man of color. Jeffrey Fortin argues that “at an early age,
Cuffe adopted Benjamin Franklin’s popular philosophy of the self-made man, believing he could transcend social and racial limitations through hard work” (Fortin 248).

Similarly, Philip Gould observes, “Like Venture Smith, Cuffe was a commercial success story in his day, a model for the self-made entrepreneur” (Gould 129). Regarding the latter, Gould’s arguments situate Cuffe in a tradition of early black Atlantic capitalists who promoted the commercialized expansion of Africa over the “barbaric traffic” of slavery.

I concede that Cuffe’s writing does sanction his entrepreneurial activities and his endorsement of some of the tenets of political and economic liberalism, such as self-possession, free labor, private property, and the right to contract. Furthermore, as this chapter demonstrates, it is clear that his promotion of liberalism appears to relegate both indigenous Africans and Native Americans to a subordinate place in a hierarchically stratified division of racial identities. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, promoting Cuffe as a liberal success story or even classifying him as a champion of unbridled, free-market capitalism oversimplifies his views, especially those in Sierra Leone. These approaches fail to consider the intersubjective dimensions of Cuffe’s plans, and his syncretic approach to the religious, economic, and political empowerment of the Friendly Society. His writing suggests that he was not naive to the increasingly racially structured marketplace. He understood that the nation’s investment in slavery was part of an embedded structure of marginalization that could not be dismantled through self-possessive individualism. For years as a coastal trading merchant he experienced first

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57 As Gould points out, Peter Williams Jr.’s eulogy of Cuffe contributed to this image, for as Williams, proclaimed, he rose “from a state of poverty, ignorance, and obscurity, through a host of difficulties, and with an unsullied conscience, by the native energy of his mind” and “elevated himself to wealth, to influence, to respectability and honor” (129).
hand what David Kazanjian calls “racial capitalism,” or, a “set of discursive practices that articulated formal and abstract equality with the codification of race, nation, and gender in the North Atlantic during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (39). His initial experiences in Sierra Leone confirmed that racial capitalism was a transatlantic phenomenon not limited to the U.S. Therefore, my analysis of Cuffe concentrates on his construction of intersubjective black coalitions in response to racial capitalism. The problem in Sierra Leone, as he understood it, was that settlers could never achieve success as individuals. Their alienation was the source of their disempowerment. His writings suggest the group, not the individual, needed to become the source of power and resistance in Africa. While he valued the importance of individual property ownership, citizenship rights, and personal industry, he complicated these ideologies by throwing his weight behind a plan based on cross-cultural cooperation held together by Christian intersubjectivity.

As with other chapters, I rely on a broad definition of literature that includes less traditional forms of private and published writing, especially the mariner’s logbook. My analysis of Cuffe’s plans for the Friendly Society relies on a body of archival resources that, in addition to his logbook, includes his personal journals and letters. In Sierra Leone, his logbook served as a hybrid text in which he recorded maritime records, personal reflections, detailed business transactions, and ethnographic observations on the culture and geography of the region.\footnote{There are two logbooks and a series of letter books. They reside in the New Bedford Public Library. Rosalind Wiggins has compiled nearly all of Cuffe’s writing into an anthology. This includes his logbook and letters. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be citing Cuffe’s writing by referring to Wiggins’s anthology, rather than citing the logbook and the letters individually.} I read it not as a straightforward or factual account of the proceedings of the Friendly Society, but with an eye toward how Cuffe represented
issues, conflicts, ideologies, and potential forms of redress. The logbook provides a window into how one prolific black writer framed his own involvement in the first transatlantic colonization project in Africa. In this chapter I analyze Cuffe’s letters. During his lifetime, but especially during his involvement with the Friendly Society, Cuffe was a prolific letter writer. Hundreds of surviving letters chronicle his extensive network of family members, friends, business associates, religious affiliates, political connections, antislavery activists, financial investors, and government leaders. These letters represent a unique archive of cross-cultural, circum-Atlantic relationship building in the early Republican era. Cuffe’s prolific correspondence with Friendly Society members, as well as those interested in its survival located in other circum-Atlantic locations from Massachusetts to Philadelphia to London and Sierra Leone, represents some of the most important epistolary documentation of debates centered on early pan-African consciousness. The Friendly Society, and Cuffe specifically, participated in a black network of letters that are essential to maintaining personal relationships, promoting sympathy, agency, and ultimately furthering the Society’s causes. Remarking on the significance of epistolary networks in this early Republican period, Konstantin Dierks argues, “This was another cultural narrative that accumulated in the letters, not the perceived remoteness, not the real distances, but the will and effort to sustain connections contained within an empire expanding its reach on an unprecedented global scale in the eighteenth century” (105-106). My analysis incorporates Dierks’ arguments, recognizing that Cuffe depended upon letters to sustain the Society’s mission when he was not physically present in the colony.
Racial Capitalism in Sierra Leone

When Cuffe first became interested in Sierra Leone and when he first engaged in discussions with the Friendly Society about economics, he was bringing a lifetime of relative success as a black mariner in trading along the circum-Atlantic periphery. This aspect of his biography is perhaps the most well known. From an early age, he learned the finer arts of maritime navigation, and blended this talent with an aptitude for business and trading. By the time he became interested in Sierra Leone in 1809, he had already amassed a sizeable degree of wealth and private investments, including ownership in his own ship, sizeable land deeds, and other assets. Historians estimate that he may have invested and lost as much as $8000 of his own money, an enormous sum for that time (Thomas 103). His initial foray into the project centered on expanding his trading markets, and with his primary cargo of beef, bread, and flour, Cuffe imagined Sierra Leone as a potentially lucrative contact zone of exchange. However, once he became familiar with the people, the history of the settlement, and a witness to the structural inequality that marginalized the settlers, he shifted his priorities. He adopted the mantle of their transnational political advocate, believing that strategic changes to ideology and practice could disrupt their collective alienation from market equality and political rights.

Cuffe recognized the settlers’ differences almost immediately upon arriving in the colony and his logbook reflects the tensions and contradictions in his understanding of African subjectivity. He recorded his own unofficial census, noting the ethnic makeup of each of the groups. First, he identified the “Europeans,” as the smallest group, followed by the “Nova Scotians” whom he characterized as “otherwise americans” (118). Next, he lists the “Meroons from Jamica Westindians,” and then “Africans born in affrica,” among
which were the “Cruemen,” local natives that worked in the maritime industry in the port. After listing each group, he notes basic observations about each of them, attending to the fact that members subdivided themselves along cultural and especially denominational lines. A devout Quaker who refused to drink alcohol, Cuffe despaired at what he perceived to be the settlers’ dependence on “Spiritous Liquors” (216). He found their denominational disputes frustrating, and was troubled by the existence of native servants that labored in less than ideal conditions on the settlers farms (119). He was both intrigued and troubled by the Krumen. They were experienced and able seamen and he found them dependable workers. Some of them were pagans, “adorers of the new moon,” while others practiced Islam and spoke Arabic (119). Regarding the latter, Cuffe praised them because they did not consume alcohol. However, they resisted Christian conversion, claiming they were “no White men, and their fathers taught them thus” (119). This comment suggests that Muslim Africans associated whiteness with Christianity. That their “fathers taught them thus” implies a historical cultural narrative built into their resistance to evangelism. Despite this opposition and their restrictions on alcohol, native Africans’ commitment to either paganism or Islam precluded them from membership in the Friendly Society. For Cuffe, the Society could accommodate cross-cultural and religious differences across Christian denominations, but could go no further.

59 Readers should note the proper spelling of “Cruemen” is “Krumen,” and I will use this spelling for any additional references to this group in the chapter.

60 Cuffe never attends to the relatively recent conflicts between the Maroons and the Nova Scotians. Because Cuffe arrived nearly a decade after these events, perhaps his omission of this conflict reflects more amiable relations between the two groups.

61 Scholars speculate these servants were probably repatriated slaves. During this period, Freetown served as the British center for captured European and American ships caught in violation of the transatlantic ban on slavery passed in 1807. When the British Royal Navy brought slavers to Freetown, the slaves were set free and many of them became immersed in the local towns and villages, including Freetown. Cuffe’s writings indicate several instances in which this takes place.
Because of their histories of captivity, enslavement, and exploitation, members of the Friendly Society had histories of recreating social life in opposition to social death. They did so in a series of relocations in circum-Atlantic settings during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Tracing their movements and locating the reasons for their arrival in Sierra Leone require a brief overview of the founding of the colony and how those involved imagined its purpose. Formal plans for a colony of free black British subjects began with the British antislavery movement and included Granville Sharp, John Clarkson (Thomas Clarkson’s brother), and Olaudah Equiano. In the late 1780s, more than a decade after Equiano’s experiences on the Miskito Coast, he became involved in what became known in England as an African resettlement project. He was appointed by the British government to assist with the transfer of a small but diverse community of men and women known as London’s “Black Poor,” who were being relocated by the Crown to a small colony in west Africa known as Sierra Leone. Comprised of ex-slaves, free blacks, and others who had found their way to London via transatlantic maritime circuits, the Black Poor were unwelcome in England. To address the issue, antislavery advocates promoted an alternative. Led by Sharp, they attempted to resettle the community on the African coast and promote so-called British civilization on the continent. Unfortunately for Equiano, the project did not work out. He accused officials of corruption and in turn, critics vilified him in the local press. The settlement went

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62 This group was comprised of colonial African Americans who fought with the British during the American Revolution. British officials relocated them to London after the war, where they experienced exclusion and economic hardship for years before plans developed for the Sierra Leone Colony.
ahead as planned, but did not last, as settlers were victimized by the onset of disease and military attacks by local natives.63

In 1792, a second plan emerged under the leadership of Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce. Clarkson and Wilberforce joined with Quaker antislavery activists, including William Allen, to create a joint-stock enterprise known as the Sierra Leone Company to manage a new colony of resettled black British subjects. A few years after the disastrous first attempt at resettlement in Sierra Leone, nearly twelve hundred British black Loyalists from Birchtown and Shelburne, Nova Scotia immigrated to Freetown, Sierra Leone, with the promise of land and economic freedom. Most of the Nova Scotians were originally slaves in southern American colonies. Some of them, including John Kizell, were originally from Africa. They had survived the middle passage and enslavement in colonies such as Virginia and South Carolina. During the Revolutionary War, they accepted British promises of emancipation in exchange for political loyalty and military service. After the war, the British evacuated most of them to Nova Scotia, while a smaller group settled in London.64 Terrible living conditions meant that many felt freedom in British Canada was not much better than slavery in the colonies (Sidbury 92). The Nova Scotian communities were deeply religious, but spiritual tensions led to communal fractures among the Wesleyans, Huntingdonians, and Baptists. Well-traveled transatlantic figures, John Marrant and Boston King, both quoted in the Introduction, were Methodist ministers in Birchtown, while George Liele and David George, also cited in the Introduction, were leading Baptist preachers. Once in Freetown, they collectively

63 For more detailed analysis of this history, see Pederson, Fyfe, Carretta “Biography,” and Sidbury.
64 Readers may recall the latter group became known as London’s Black Poor and were the first group to settle the Sierra Leone colony in the late 1780s.
referred to themselves as “Nova Scotians” (Sidbury 91), but their denominational differences remained prominent features of their collective identities, as well as obstacles to political solidarity.

From the beginning of their immigration to Sierra Leone, the Nova Scotians encountered broken promises that led many to question their decision to emigrate from British Canada. Locally, these broken promises reflected the codification of race, citizenship, and liberalism in the greater Atlantic world in this era. Despite being free British subjects, they did not enjoy the liberties and equal benefits of citizenship. They occupied a subordinate position in the colony as free blacks relegated to an inferior status. Between 1792 and 1800, they clashed with political authorities over land, taxation, and other economic and political conflicts. Originally, Granville Sharp and John Clarkson promised settlers twenty acres of land in Freetown, but local officials granted only five when settlers arrived (Peterson 30). A series of governors, William Dawes, Zachary Macaulay, and Thomas Ludlum, enforced regulations and restrictions on land and trade that settlers repeatedly resisted. Near the turn of the century, Macaulay attempted to force settlers to pay quit-rent land taxes on their property. The settlers rebelled, claiming that the government had promised land “free of all expense” (32). Land disputes led to a series of violent confrontations between the Nova Scotians and white leaders, among which were the settlers’ threat to assassinate Governor Dawes for his exploitative policies (30-31). By 1799, a new Crown charter granted the Sierra Leone Company the power to abolish the settlers’ basic legal rights. The Nova Scotians rebelled with force, and the Crown sent soldiers to quell the rebellion. Many Nova Scotians fled to the local native Temne community, where they found sanctuary. The
confrontation lasted several years. In 1800, Dawes paid nearly 600 Jamaican Maroon settlers, who had recently immigrated to the colony, to help subdue the revolt. Originally members of a free black community in the mountains of Jamaica, the Maroons had a history of resistance to British colonialism on the island before experiencing a decisive loss in the Second Maroon War in 1796. A year later, the British forcibly evacuated over 500 Maroons from the island and sent them to Nova Scotia. The Maroons balked at this decision and appealed for a second resettlement in Africa. In the fall of 1800, they landed in Freetown in the midst of the uprising. The Maroons played a decisive role in crushing the Nova Scotian rebellion, and the local authorities remained in power. Between 1800 and 1808, settlers attempted to pick up the pieces by re-organizing their homes and communities and returning to the business of trying to succeed in a colonial system dedicated to their disempowerment. When Cuffe landed in Freetown in 1810, tensions between the Nova Scotian and Maroon communities had cooled, but land disputes between the settlers and the governorship persisted. White Europeans still comprised approximately one percent of the population controlled three-fifths of all property in the colony (Thomas 51).

Other major problems for the settlers were structured economic injustices that restricted them from freely and equally developing their business interests in local and Atlantic markets. Cuffe organized the Friendly Society to combat these injustices, but the Society white merchants, supported by local leadership, put up roadblocks at nearly every turn. Trading firms such as Macaulay and Babington controlled trade, set prices, and set up obstacles for Nova Scotian merchants. Working intimately with the political authorities, these firms controlled production of goods, taxes, trade partnerships,
transportation costs, and prices. In a letter to Nathan Lord in 1815, Cuffe supported these claims when he wrote, “The Colonists complained to me that of the European merchants imposed on them in price of articles that the colonist raised and offered for sale and that it became discouraged for them to raise any more then to sustain their wants” (342). Thomas details, “Black merchants were bitter over the refusal of Macaulay and Babington’s firm to ship fifteen tons of processed rice for the Friendly Society; the rice lay rotting on the docks, thanks to the persistent and systematic exclusion of blacks by white traders” (84). That one of the colony’s governors also operated a profitable trading venture in the region did not appear as a conflict of interest to Sierra Leone Company officials. According to Thomas, John Kizell, the Friendly Society’s second president, wrote a letter to the African institute and criticized “the white ‘speculators’ who cared ‘not a copper’ for the colony and held blacks ‘below the rank of freemen’” (qtd. in Thomas 91). Kizell calls forth the rhetoric of liberty to portray inequality in the market as akin to slavery. Enhancing Kizell’s point, seven Maroons attempted to flee the colony and return to Jamaica, suggesting that life in a colony where slavery was still legal was preferable to life in Freetown. Authorities denied their requests, and used various legal schemes to threaten fines and jail for any settlers who opposed them (Thomas 91). For the settlers, the name Freetown itself was a mockery—a poignant reminder of the racially codified hierarchy of citizenship and capitalism that allowed elite whites to profit from their denigration.

65 Lord was a member of the Andover Theological Seminary and colleague of colonization advocates Samuel Mills and Jedidiah Morse. Between 1815 and 1817, Cuffe exchanged many letters with these men in discussing the strengths and weaknesses of African colonization projects.
Cuffe first became involved in the colony through his Quaker contacts in Newport and Philadelphia. In 1810 and 1811, he traveled to the coastal colony twice with an eye toward establishing new trading partnerships. Initially, he was somewhat ambivalent regarding the politics of the colony. However, it did not take long before immersed himself in local affairs. He sandwiched his two trips to Freetown around a visit to England, where he met the leaders of the African Institute, among them Quaker philanthropist William Allen and antislavery activist Thomas Clarkson. He understood that any success in Sierra Leone depended upon strong relationships with the Institute. He recognized that the settlers needed stronger advocacy with the Institute, so took it upon himself to fill this role. The economic embargos between England and the U.S. represented major obstacles to his initial plans. Because Cuffe’s work in Sierra Leone took place before and during the War of 1812, he found it difficult to obtain trading licenses with England that would allow him to freely trade in the colony. He depended on the African Institute in London to procure trade exemptions on his three trips to Africa and he encountered obstacles each time. Because of the War, British officials felt that allowing Cuffe a trading license would undermine the national restrictions on trade with the U.S. (Thomas 88). Meanwhile in the U.S. Cuffe found resistance to his plan from the federal government. On one return trip his ship was impounded, forcing him to travel to Washington D.C. to obtain a trading exemption. His petition to Congress for funds for the development of a future black colonization project in Sierra Leone found support among many, but not enough to result in financial support. His interest in trading with a British colony during a time of War led one anonymous newspaper writer to accuse Cuffe
of being “a political heretic, a federalist, an enemy of the war, and one of those people called Friends” (Thomas 90).

Cuffé’s Friendly Society represents a direct attempt to challenge racial capitalism in the colony. In an abstract sense, the plan called for commitment to private property ownership and participation in some form of labor or trade. This was not a hard sell. It merely reiterated what the settlers had asked for all along. In a letter to colonization advocate Nathan Lord in 1815, he justified the belief that all that Africans (and their descendants) possessed the natural rights inherent in Locke’s vision of liberalism, despite claims to the contrary. He challenged dominant ideological beliefs that Africans were inferior by nature, incapable of self-government, and deficient in intellect. He argued, “we are the decendance of that countery brought away by violence, sold hard in slavery, deprived of injoying our liberty the natural rites of man” (342). He punctuated this belief with the possessive pronoun “our,” indicating that these were not rights to be earned, but rights they inherently possessed. The practical part of his plan incorporated the tenets of liberalism to mobilize individual industry combined with an organized commitment to the development of agriculture, manufacturing, and whaling.66 Levecq defines liberalism in this era as a “Lockean philosophy grounded in the individual, freedom, and natural rights, and that is further associated with entrepreneurship and the free pursuit of self-interest” (3). According to Locke’s philosophy, individuals become subjects because each human being is embodied with natural rights, particularly the ability to freely contract his or her labor within a free market of commodity exchange. David Kazanjian

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66 For a comprehensive overview of the economic system of mercantilism at this moment, see Kazanjian 39-43.
summarizes, “the subjectivity of the economic and political actor in civil society under capitalism is supposed to be ‘freed’ (i.e. abstracted) from material particularities, a freedom that renders all subjects in civil society formally interchangeable and thus formally and abstractly equal” (50). In this idealistic vision, settlers inherited the status of Lockean subjectivity by owning themselves, their labor, and their lands.

At first glance, this plan seems to support Gould’s contention that Cuffe endorsed a conventional form of political and economic liberalism. However, Cuffe was not disillusioned about the prospects of rugged individualism in the colony. He recognized that individualism was no solution for a community of people alienated from one another and disassociated from the government that was established to promote and enforce their political and economic freedom. To borrow Kazanjian’s arguments, members of the Friendly Society were not, “freed from material particularities.” Thus, Cuffe did not champion an open, free, and egalitarian marketplace in Sierra Leone in which blacks and whites could equally exchange goods, resources, and capital. He did not believe local authorities and trading firms could be convinced out of their own generosity to abdicate their hold on the market. He also realized that as long as settlers remained indebted to white leaders and mired in relative indentured servitude, they would struggle to alter their situation. Drawing upon his own experiences, he began championing a vision of black business owners, merchants and whaling captains who were powerful and financially solvent based on their ability to cooperate with one another. He did not simply envision free and equal black labor. He imagined black laborers as owners, managers, and ship captains—as empowered agents of their own collective prosperity.
Cuffe based his plan on the notion that freedom and equality resided in the collective will of the Society and its survival depended upon the mutually recognized cooperation of its members. To develop this plan, Cuffe abstracted freedom to the community, rather than the individual. Alienated, second-class citizens could not receive free and equal standing in a racialized market. In 1814, in a letter to Nathaniel Senter he wrote, “My plan is to take to African Some Sober Stedy habited peopel of Colour in order to incourage Soberity and industry and to interduce Culieriantion and Commersce So that the African may become their own Carryer and imploy their Citizens as meriners” (276). Africans’ self-determination and economic independence will come from their own collective efforts. His plan for putting this into action was for “representatives of her own nation” to open a “new Chanell of intercours with the interes of Africa as a fare and friendly intercours” (276). These lines crystallize Cuffe’s project. Using the metaphor of intimate relations binding two parties together, he sought to establish economic relations between the Friendly Society and other African benevolent societies located in the U.S. This “intercours” could work for Africa’s “interes[s]” and be “fare” and “friendly.” It needed to be cooperative because only through mutual benefit could they succeed in areas where, previously, “we Could not git by an induvidual enterprise” (276). Cooperation was the force for change. He believed economic development based on socially constructed unity generated collective resistance to systematic exploitation.

He did not need to convince the settlers of this vision. Young men were already working as merchant seamen, others had developed farms, and some were moderately successful traders. Thus, he was drawing upon the Friendly Society’s own wishes in his pursuit of their “natural rights.” Settlers wrote to William Allen at the African Institute in
London, outlining their unity “in sentiment with our respected Friend Capt. Cuffe” (qtd. in Thomas 70). Although they revealed that some members of the colony could be more productive, they declared, “if you will have the goodness to give directions to the master of some vessel” to allow their goods to be sold in England, “we would most assuredly turn our attention to our farms” (70). The Friendly Society needed no motivation from Cuffe to stimulate its economic development. They needed assurances that the institutional roadblocks that historically impeded their potential profits would be lifted to allow them access to the market.

This required Cuffe’s ability to convince the African Institute of the necessity of this plan, and to bring forth the required resources and political backing to make it happen. On his first trip to England William Allen made such a major impression on Cuffe that the two became lifelong friends and associates, corresponding until Cuffe’s death in 1817. Thomas writes, “By the end of July the two men had grown in ‘nearness of spirit’ thanks to Friends Meetings and conversations late into the evening” (59). Cuffe tried to convince Allen and other members of the Institute that former Sierra Leone Governor Macaulay’s trading firm represented a significant conflict of interest as an institutionalized economic obstacle in the colony. After Cuffe returned to Sierra Leone, Allen wrote to Cuffe, confirming that although they could not disengage Macaulay from his role in government and business, they could remove him from leadership in the African Institute. Allen wrote, Macaulay “can form no part of this association for the benefit of the black Settlers as we have passed a Resolution that no person can be a member of it who trades to Africa for his own profit” (355). Allen’s revelation indicated that the Institute understood the structural impediments to the Friendly Society’s success.
Summarizing Cuffe’s relationship with Allen, Thomas writes, “Henceforth, William
Allen, a director of the African Institution and England’s Quaker editor of the
Philanthropist, would go on record as the advocate for Africans under British rule” (64).
Cuffe persuaded him of the need for this decision. Their relationship inspired Allen’s
decision to advocate for the Society. Unfortunately for Cuffe, Allen possessed limited
power to initiate the fundamental change needed.

Cuffe’s plan called for a sense of collectivity based on spiritual intersubjectivity.
He wanted the settlers to protect one another’s individual vulnerability in the marketplace
through a shared commitment to community uplift and feelings of mutual benevolence.
The lynchpin to his vision was that commercial trade and Quaker religious beliefs were
mutually constitutive. Earlier in this chapter I quoted Cuffe’s remarks about the
formation of the Friendly Society and its purpose. I reiterate them here to remind readers
that Cuffe intentionally used words and phrases such as “mutual benefit” and
“benevolence” to describe the Society’s goals. Its “Duty,” he wrote, was “to take Every
Matter into their Care that appeared to be for the Beneficial good of the univarse” (174).
Later, after returning to Massachusetts and reading positive reports about the Society’s
harmonious relations, he wrote to them expressing satisfaction that the community “had
mularity [mutually] concord together in imbodying yourselves in Africas great and good
cause, that thee may EXSPERANCE peace and good will toward men and in Glory to
God on high” (227). In his petition to Congress, he declared that this project was
“dictated by that philanthropy which is the offspring of Christian benevolence” (252). He
insisted upon a foundation of reciprocal benevolence that minimized heavy emphasis on
individual pursuits and rewards. These examples represent his attempt to create a
community that can follow the rules of mercantile exchange based on the Christian teachings of mutual humanity and interdependent benevolence. In calling for group solidarity and mutual benevolence, he constructed a form of intersubjectivity in which individual actors put aside their differences, recognized one another’s individual humanity, and collectively worked for the betterment of the group. In his “Address,” Cuffe wrote to the Friendly Society that when they meet with one another and “consult with each other for your mutual good,” such meetings will “be owned by the Lord.” Quoting Matthew 18:20, he defined the spiritual foundations of the Society as, “Where there is 2 or 3 gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them” (8). That God is a spirit that exists in relationships devoted to mutual good succinctly captures Cuffe’s intersubjective spirituality. It also underscores the benevolent mission of the Friendly Society. To exist is to be in relationship. This complex theology imagined people of color as connected, interdependent, and recipients of God’s favor. When he praised the Society for “mutality [mutually] concord together in imbodying yourselves in Africas great and good cause,” he was indicating that individual merchants trying to find footing in a racialized marketplace are linked to larger movements around the Atlantic.

Sentimental feeling for others served as the terms of exchange, keeping the Friendly Society organized, unified, and collectively directed. Cuffe used the rhetoric of “brotherhood” as a racially circumscribed call for sentimental relations among the cross-cultural members of the Friendly Society. In many of the documents he published, he inclusively portrays the community along national and kinship lines by using phrases such as “the Scattered brethren and fellow countrymen at Sierra Leone” and “my African brethren and fellow countrymen” (233). In these lines, he calls forth a sense of cross-
cultural bonding based on equality by characterizing the Society as “brothers.” He seeks to deepen a sense of intimacy and cooperation by suggesting settlers as if they are family members that need to treat one another as if they are blood relations. In fact, he actually identified members as “family” during a meeting shortly after the creation of the Friendly Society. He writes, “We called our Little family together this Evening With the Sick and had Very agreabel open time” (178). In this instance, however, references like “family” and “brethren” are more than just references to private, familial connections. Creating a sense of family became a way to establish interdependent relationships that will work for the public, collective, political good of the Friendly Society’s members. Kinship references such as “African brethren” signal uplifting relations among a disparate group of people who can transcend cultural and religious differences for the sake of their common good. What members shared in common, regardless of racial or religious background, was a shared sense of oppression based on race. In his “Address” he wrote, “Come . . . let us walk together in the light of the Lord” because “in so doing you will find a living hope which will be as an anchor to the soul and a support under afflictions” (233). By pinpointing “affliction” as the source of their common ground, Cuffe capitalized on the members’ sense of frustration with white British authorities. His “Address” suggests that to be “African brethren” was to be united under “affliction,” rather than an arbitrary sense of blackness.

The significance of Cuffe’s use of relational sentiment becomes clearer when paired with Levecq’s thorough analysis of sentiment in transatlantic antislavery writing of the era. She writes, “political ideologies of liberalism and republicanism played an important role in shaping eighteenth- and nineteenth- century appeals to, and expressions
of, sentiment about people who were suffering, and particularly about people who were enslaved” (16). She considers how authors used sentiment to question “how their world might be moved to care more broadly,” for “expressions of feeling in eighteenth- and nineteenth century transatlantic texts about slavery and the slave trade appealed not just to individual readers’ moral feelings but to their political assumptions as well” (16). Cuffe’s letters indicate that he was moved by concern to care for the settlers. However, he did not necessarily configure sentiment as an exchange of feeling between two individuals. He sought to channel sentiment among the Society toward the collective group, rather than just among individuals.

In Cuffe’s writings, sentimental fellow-feeling represented the affectual bonds connecting individual subjects to the collective group. Sympathy also represented the link between members of the Society trying to enter the marketplace. This fits with other writers from the period who argued for the importance of sentimental ties within the liberalist framework. According to Stephen Shapiro, “The display of associative emulation and fellow-feeling was the means by which the bourgeoisie could signal to each other that one was not going to be ‘selfish’ and cause another merchant’s downfall by breaking the chain of bills of exchange in the safe distance away from physical force” (69). In a mercantile world moving away from local trade among blood relations and toward broad networks among disassociated individuals, sentiment became the force for assuring reliable and reciprocal forms of equal exchange. Shapiro elaborates, “With the

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67 I recognize that for scholars of sentiment, Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) is an essential text that pinpoints how sympathy acts as an intersubjective exchange between individual members of the marketplace. Smith refrains from celebrating the market as an arena of rugged, competitive individualism. Instead, he favors the kind of fellow-feeling we see emerging in Cuffe’s letters to the Friendly Society.
collective spectator in his breast, a mercantile man of feeling uses sympathy as informal insurance protecting the links of credit (69). In the Friendly Society, mutually expressed sympathy became a sign among “friends” that the group cared for one’s personal, spiritual, and economic concerns. Such feelings mediated one’s risk in the marketplace. Traders who knew one another and were joined by their social bonds needed to balance their own desire for profit with a devotion to another’s investment. For Cuffe, this explains the significance of the benevolent relations that defined the Society’s larger mission. In essence, this is why they named it a “Friendly” Society. However, because of the racialized marketplace that Cuffe encountered, sympathy could not provide insurance that would liberate the Friendly Society’s members from their plight. As Glenn Hendler explains, “if I have to be like you and feel like you in order for you to feel for me, sympathy reaches its limits at the moment you are reminded that I am not quite like you” (8). Hendler’s point emphasizes the basic challenge to sentimental ties in any liberal framework. It also represents Cuffe’s greatest fears for the Society. In Freetown, religious and cultural differences among the settlers demanded that he continually work to reinforce the cross-cultural ties. The use of sentiment, in this case, was part of an ongoing process of building and maintaining relationships over a long period. He continually pushed for a spiritual sense of love and friendship that asks members to transcend their differences.

The radical dimensions of Cuffe’s call for mutuality and cooperation were rooted in his life’s work as a man of the sea. In its multi-ethnic composition and its solidarity among marginalized proletarian workers, the Friendly Society resembled the organized labor and culture of an eighteenth-century transatlantic ship. As Marcus Rediker argues,
“Seamen were, by their experiences in the maritime labor market and labor process, among the first collective laborers” (78). Crews were comprised of men from all over the world. Such labor consisted of “loading, sailing, and unloading vessels,” and seamen were expected to perform these tasks cooperatively (79). Due to the dangerous nature of the work, survival depended on this cooperation. By working in unison, and sharing in the often degrading and exploitative nature of the work, seamen created new forms of community and social relations aboard ships. As Rediker argues, “Social bonds among sailors arose from the very conditions and relations of their work... Theirs was a collectivism of necessity” (111). Viewed from this perspective, the Friendly Society appears as multi-ethnic, land-based, “motley crew” of the Atlantic world. Cuffe envisioned it as an engine of cooperation among a heterogeneous lot of landed workers, many of which had ties to maritime labor. When Cuffe called for individuals to collectively work together for the common good, he invoked the push and pull of maritime labor that marked a successful transatlantic voyage. Because this organized cooperation threatened the racialized hierarchies of trade in Sierra Leone, Rediker argues that maritime labor was “a complex blend of cooperation and confrontation” in which the seaman became adept at “tactics to break the ‘formal’ control of capital and to assert his own ends against those mandated from above” (114). Among these “tactics” were strikes, work stoppages, piracies, and mutinies (114). While Cuffe does not indicate that the settlers pursued such work stoppages while he was visiting the colony, the Friendly Society’s formal organization resembles a multi-ethnic collaboration of workers intending to disrupt the flows of labor and capital in the colony. Just as seamen worked together to plan strikes to resist impressment and other forms of exploitation, the Friendly
Society’s cooperative collaboration marked its attempt to activate the collective betterment of its members.

Complicating this vision was Cuffe’s own hierarchically inflected power as a longtime captain and owner of his ship. While at sea, Cuffe was in charge, and while on land in Africa he never abdicated that authority. He embedded his own sense of power and responsibility in his role in the Friendly Society. His authority modifies the image of the Society as a purely proletarian resistance movement. Cuffe’s wealth and status meant he occupied a higher class status than many of the settlers, and while he persevered to respect their cultural, religious, and economic practices, he made sure that his own personal plans were rooted in the foundations of the Society. In making this claim, I do not meant to suggest that he acted upon an authoritarian sense of power. His logbook and letters illustrate his attempts to listen to members, visit with church groups and families, and incorporate the needs and plans of a variety of members. I characterize his involvement as one that combined his own vision and agenda with the beliefs and needs of leaders in the community. His writings suggest that he saw himself as a captain of sorts, an experienced leader possessing a vision for the future. A unique aspect of Cuffe’s maritime leadership was his insistence on hiring and working with men of color, and this experience informed his plans for black labor in the colony. Many of his crews constituted black-Native family members, including his sons and nephews. He filled the positions on his ship with black, Native and mixed-race men from local towns and ports in Massachusetts, including the Wampanoag whalers of Nantucket, Martha’s Vineyard and New Bedford. Years of working with black and Native men provide precedent for Cuffe’s involvement in a colonization project intended to uplift the black community of
Sierra Leone. He had used his limited power and authority as a seaman to channel jobs and opportunities for people of color denied them in other facets of U.S. culture. In Sierra Leone, he continued that mission.

The presence of Native mariners in Sierra Leone resonates with a broader analysis in this dissertation, which is to better understand cross-cultural encounters among black and Native people in coastal Atlantic contact zones. During Cuffe’s involvement in the project, there were at least three people in Sierra Leone with close ties to North American Native culture. In addition to Cuffe, his nephew Thomas Wainer, who served as Cuffe’s first mate on the trips to Africa, maintained kinship affiliations with Gay Head Indians on Martha’s Vineyard. After leaving Sierra Leone, Thomas and his family moved to upstate New York and bought property in the community of Christian Natives in Brothertown-New Stockbridge (Geherin). Among the original Nova Scotian settlers of Sierra Leone, Baptist minister David George’s wife Phyllis, a Creek Indian, lived in the colony. George wrote and published *An Account of the Life of Mr. David George* (1793-1797) in Sierra Leone. In his narrative, he recounts his escape from slavery in Virginia and his life among the Creek and Natchez Indians, including his marriage to Phyllis, a member of the Creeks (George 334). George died shortly before Cuffe arrived in the colony, so the two never met, but the presence of his wife among Nova Scotian settlers raises provocative speculation regarding the possible influences of Creek culture on the settlers.

The same questions emerge in consideration of Cuffe’s ambivalence regarding his Native identity. As with his nephew, Cuffe maintained kinship relations among the Gay
As a child, Cuffe was raised among this community when his father Kofi, an emancipated slave, and his mother Ruth, a Wampanoag woman, married and began building their family of ten children on the island in the 1760s. Several years later, most of the immediate family moved to mainland Massachusetts where they bought property and lived together, but several became permanent residents in the Native community. In 1783 Cuffe followed his father’s model and married Alice Pequit, a local Native woman. Several of Cuffe’s surviving letters detail family trips to the island where they would participate in local Baptist church services. His letters also indicate that throughout his life he kept a close watch in the business and political affairs for the vulnerable Gay Head community, which was constantly under siege by those seeking to seize traditional Native lands and convert them to highly profitable agricultural farms.

I argue that Cuffe’s cultural affiliations with Gay Head Wampanoag culture partially informed his designs on the intersubjective foundations of the Friendly Society. This argument challenges the conventional scholarship on Cuffe and his associations with Native culture, which insists that Cuffe favored his diasporic African identity and

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68 More commonly known as Aquinnah, in Cuffe’s time the community was referred to as Gay Head. For that reason, I will use that reference in this chapter. It is located on the western tip of Martha’s Vineyard, a short boat ride from mainland Massachusetts and the Cuffe family farm in Westport. 69 Historians know little about Ruth Moses, beyond her marriage to Kofi Slocum. Some speculate she was a member of the Mashpee Christian Indian community. Others suggest she was part of the Gay Head community. Regardless, both groups are Wampanoag affiliated. 70 Similar to Ruth, the biography of Alice Pequit remains somewhat of a mystery to scholars. Cuffe includes few personal details about her in his writing. Some historians believe she was Pequot. Others suggest Wampanoag. Nobody knows for sure where she was born or what community she was affiliated with. However, the fact that Cuffe often took her to Gay Head suggests she may have originally been a part of that tribe. 71 Cuffe’s older brother Jonathan permanently settled in Gay Head, marrying into the community and becoming involved in local politics. Several of Cuffe’s surviving letters detail family trips to Gay Head, where the family would participate in local Baptist church services. Surviving letters also indicate that throughout his life Cuffe kept a close watch in the business and political affairs for the Gay Head, which was constantly under siege by those seeking to seize traditional Native lands and convert them to profitable agricultural farms.
relinquished his Native affiliations in the process (Silverman 253; Bolster “Black Sailors” 437). Since well before colonial contact and European colonialism in North America, the Gay Head’s main economic modalities were based on sharing land and resources and practicing communal lifeways. By the eighteenth century, these contrasted with Anglo-American concepts of private property ownership and the political tenets of liberal individualism. As Silverman argues, “It took exposure to English private-property ways, missionaries, and especially threats against the Native land base for Wampanoags to see communalism as the core of their peoplehood in the colonial world” (183).

Communalism for the Gay Head entailed the sharing of resources, including pastures for livestock grazing, wood, fruit, fishing, excavation of valuable clay from its nearby cliffs, and even collective times for harvesting. It also incorporated an intersubjective sense of community identity (183). Mandell argues that in the early republican period communal values practiced by Native people were under attack. These values and practices helped tribes such as the Gay Head maintain a sense of identity tied to historical cultural traditions: “By 1800, a market economy for produce, capital, and labor had matured in

72 These philosophical differences have led some scholars to conclude that he had already relinquished the Native components of his identity by the time he arrived in Africa (Silverman 253; Bolster “Black Sailors” 437). Daniel Silverman includes Cuffe in a discussion of eighteenth and nineteenth century black-Native men from New England who were “born off-island or spent years in the city without fostering an Indian identity and considered themselves members of the black community” (253). These positions held by Silverman and Bolster imply Cuffe rejected some kind of authentic Native identity simply because he did not write about his culture with pride or define his cultural affiliations in detail. According to Silverman’s logic, for Cuffe to “declare” himself an African meant he had to relinquish his Native identity. However, I question this logic. To “declare” himself an “African” does not mean he abdicated his Native identity. There is a subtle but important difference between the fashioning of one’s identity and maintenance of one’s interpersonal relationships.

I position my argument in line with Native scholars who have discouraged critics from arguing for “authenticity” when talking about Native identity and culture. According to Lisa Brooks, “These arguments are based on a temporal model of culture in which the most ‘authentic’ is that which exists only in the precontact past; this culture cannot change but can only be ‘preserved’ in the present” (xxxi). Brooks challenges scholars to historically situate Cuffe’s racial and cultural identity. Doing so allows us to move in a different analytical direction than those who have understood Cuffe’s bi-racial identity through a dualistic lens.
southern New England. Within the region, Indian reserves acted as reservoirs of antimarket forces. This enabled Indian communities to rebuild and maintain their sense of being a separate people, including traditions of social good rather than individualism” (36). This context suggests that Cuffe’s commitment to the social good in Sierra Leone may have been rooted in his cultural upbringing in the communal lifeways of the Gay Head. Throughout his life, he was surrounded by those who adhered to those cultural values, and those lifeways may have informed his plans for the Friendly Society’s principles of intersubjectivity and mutual benevolence. Despite these positive elements of Native Culture on Cuffe’s life and work, his philosophical differences regarding the role of private property influenced his approach to the Friendly Society and his larger plans for colonization of the continent. Cuffe only partially embraced communal lifeways. His letters regarding local Native political affairs reflected his own complicated feelings regarding his Native background and his extended African-Native kinship network. While committed to communal uplift, he rejected outright sharing of land and resources on Gay Head, and criticized the community because of this difference.73

Cuffe’s correspondence with Philadelphia Quaker and abolitionist James Pemberton provides a useful window through which to see this ambivalence play out in Sierra Leone. Pemberton believed that work accomplished by Quaker settler

73 Between 1815 and his death in 1817, while devoting much of his time, energy, and focus to the Sierra Leone project, Cuffe also remained involved with local and highly contentious political affairs. Local Native leaders asked Cuffe for assistance in dealing with land disputes with white officials and the state of Massachusetts. These letters indicate his political and philosophical differences regarding the community’s attitudes toward private property and land improvement. While Cuffe supported the Gay Head and their quest for sovereignty, he criticized their resistance to private property ownership. He encouraged leaders to develop their lands for profit and to use the profits to sustain their community. For more on this, including his letters, see Silverman 253, Mandell 89, and Wiggins 474.
communities among the Oneida Indians in upstate New York offered a plan for civilizing native Africans in Sierra Leone. He wrote, a “further service is requested to improve on this blessing for the benefit of those poor Inhabitants of Africa and for that purpose have adopted a plan as nearly similar to that which Friends are engaged for Civilization of the Indians on the borders of these American States” (79). Cuffe seemed to agree with Pemberton. On his first trip to Freetown, he carried a “Letter from the Onidan (sic) Indians” and read it aloud at two of his initial meetings with Baptist and Methodist groups. Because the letter itself has not survived, its contents remain unclear. What seems important from this detail is that Cuffe, a Black-Native man who was at odds with certain parts of his Native culture, endorsed a plan in Sierra Leone that was based on Quaker models aimed at “civilizing” other Native groups in the United States. This problematic detail positions Cuffe as a black Quaker motivated by political and economic ideologies that had contributed to the cultural genocide of the Oneida in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Daniel Richter’s analysis of Baltimore and Philadelphia Quakers and their missions to the Oneida leads him to conclude that, because the Quakers believed in the humanity of Native peoples, they could interrupt the U.S. imperial conquest of the Oneida. However, they did so by promoting their own blend of civilizing ideology rooted in Biblical Christian teachings, commitment to the marketplace, and devotion to agriculture. As Richter argues, their “well meaning” missionary attempts were rooted in racial ideologies that fixed Native peoples as “primitive hunters doomed to pitiable extinction” (628). The byproduct of their mission justified the expropriation of Native lands, both in New York and across the continent. They promoted these
ideologies despite evidence to the contrary that the Oneida were already agriculturalists and had participated in early trade through fur and hide exchange.

**African Colonization and Resistance to Racial Capitalism**

This context provides the basis from which to analyze Cuffe’s larger plans for the Friendly Society—African colonization and circular trade linking black merchants on three continents. To some degree, the sentimental notions of intersubjective benevolence that Cuffe insisted upon in the Friendly Society evaporated in discussions of indigenous Africans. The Society explicitly excluded indigenous Africans and rendered them a subordinate status in their plans for mutual uplift. When Cuffe referred to “the Scattered brethren and fellow countrymen at Sierra Leone” and “my African brethren and fellow countrymen” (233), he was not referring to local natives. His “brethren” and “countrymen” were his diasporic African kin. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Muslim and pagan Africans embodied non-Christian notions of difference. Although Cuffe never explicitly identifies that these religious differences marked natives as inferior and uncivilized, their conspicuous absence from the Society implies this view.

Cuffe’s policing of boundaries implies that his understanding of an “African” identity was more of a black, Christian, diasporic concept, rather than an essentialist description of all black people. By excluding local Africans from his network of African brotherhood, and basing this exclusion on religious terms, he defined “African” as a subject position tied to experience of life on the other side of the middle passage. To be African was to have kinship ties to the black Atlantic world of slavery and ongoing racialized subordination in the western world. One did not need to be a slave or even an
ex-slave, only to be descendants of those that were. Cuffe’s use of the kinship terms to
describe African identity places his writing in concert with larger transatlantic,
eighteenth-century black literary and religious traditions that I outlined in the
introduction. African Benevolent societies, abolitionist authors, and black freemasonry
advocates promoted diasporic notions of African identity and brotherhood in speeches,
letters, spiritual autobiographies, slave narratives, and other writings. As noted by
Christine Levecq, “By the end of the eighteenth century, brotherhood had become a
salient element of the humanitarianism present in antislavery appeals on both sides of the
Atlantic” (152). Black leaders relied on these terms to build coalitions to work on behalf
of oppressed blacks everywhere. Drawing racial boundaries allowed these societies to
manufacture a new and common sense of racial identity that could unite those throughout
the Atlantic World. They codified “African” in ways that could give it meaning and
could impart its subjects with a sense of purpose tied to collective bonding. As James
Sidbury argues, “During the second half of the eighteenth century a group of African-
descended authors and activists living in England and America began to present
themselves as ‘Africans’ despite the negative connotations that the term carried in many
whites’ minds” (6). Cuffe incorporated his notion of a diasporic African into the
foundations of the Friendly Society, and in the process, defined its limitations.

Varying and often contradictory ideological perspectives on the meaning of
civilization played a key role in Cuffe’s understanding of Native Africans and of the
Society’s larger mission on the continent. During his second visit in Sierra Leone he
“took Dinner with Thomas Richards at whose table much Was Comun’cd on Civilization
of Africa” (169). Also, in his “Memorial Petition” to the U.S. Congress in 1813, in
which he asked Congress for economic assistance to trade in the colony and to transport willing settlers from the United States, he portrayed his mission as benevolent. He had used “such means as might be in his power to promote the improvement to civilization of the Africans” (252). By indicating its benefits to the common good, he was careful to frame his narrative as potentially beneficial for all involved. Later he described himself as a “petitioner still animated with a sincere desire of making the Knowledge he has acquired and the sacrifices he has already made more permanently useful in promoting the Civilization of Africa” (253). He summarized his hopes and fears for his ideological stance on colonization when he wrote, “I hope my Plans are out of motives that are pure in rendering aid towards civilizing Africa and not on a Speculative Plan” (277).

Concerned about perceptions that he may have been motivated by personal profit, and careful to distance himself from immoral commercial speculators, he located his motives in generosity, concern for others, and justice for those of African descent. He did so even as he excludes indigenous Africans who he views as either unable or unwilling to engage in the reciprocal relations he promotes. Reciprocity, in this sense, disintegrates based on Cuffe’s inability to accommodate non-Christian cultural values into the ideological domain of the Friendly Society.

Cuffe’s designs on “civilizing Africa” were born out of competing transatlantic discourses on the prospects of colonizing African and ending the slave trade. These discourses first emerged in the late eighteenth century and brought together some of the most contentious political, economic, and moral issues of the era, including race and slavery, religion, liberalism, nationhood, and appeals for the common good. Historian John Wood Sweet documents the early development of a colonization consciousness
among northern blacks in the United States. Citing the factors such as institutionalized political and economic inequality from Massachusetts to Baltimore, he argues that some blacks were motivated to join resettlement projects in Africa, believing that they could never find equal footing with whites. Others resisted the idea, determined to challenge discrimination and cultural alienation in the U.S. (329-331). The initiation of the Sierra Leone made the possibility of colonization more of a reality and less of a fantasy and changed the way both whites and blacks thought about it. For many African Americans, despite word of the hardships of the settlers, Sierra Leone represented a sanctuary of freedom and opportunity. Some imaged it as a potential refuge for oppressed blacks in the U.S., but also as a missionary destination for black Christians seeking to spread religion abroad (Sweet 331).

Proslavery advocates in southern states made similar claims about colonization, albeit based on entirely different rationales. Some U.S. slaveholders, especially those that found contradictions in the freedom of white citizens in the young republic and the bondage of slaves, promoted colonization as a way to emancipate slaves while avoiding racial miscegenation. For prominent white leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, emancipation was not feasible without the prospect of black resettlement outside national borders. Jefferson first endorsed colonization in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784), and it remained a major political challenge for him during his career. A key issue for him was the removal of what he called “black insurgents,” and he speculated whether removing dissidents to African could also return a profit. He questioned, “whether the regulations of the place would permit us to carry or take there any mercantile objects which by affording some commercial profit, might defray the expenses of the
transportation” (153). Jefferson’s fantasy of colonization served a dual purpose; it would remove outspoken black activists who posed a threat to his vision of a white nation and allow the U.S. to profit from this transaction. Strategically, he pitched his plan as an argument for the common good when he declared, “Having long ago made up my mind on this subject, I have no hesitation in saying that I have ever thought it the most desirable measure which could be adopted, for gradually drawing off this part of our population, most advantageously for themselves as well as for us” (1240). African colonization represented an ideal alternative to equal relations among free whites and blacks and emancipated slaves. His appeal to the common good disguised more insidious intentions. As Kazanjian argues, these “resettlement projects meant to establish a Christian nation-state of free black Americans in the image of, closely allied with, and even controlled by the United States” (91). They believed an open market of African goods could prove beneficial to the treasury and offset economic dependency on England.  

On the other side of the Atlantic, in the 1780s and 90s, parliamentary leaders and antislavery advocates brought the Sierra Leone colony into being by making similar appeals to the Crown, with one key difference. English leaders hinged their proposals to the end of transatlantic slavery. Because of this, they developed strategic arguments pledging the economic benefits to transforming Africa into an industrialized British colony. Shortly after Equiano became briefly involved in the initial Sierra Leone venture, Thomas Clarkson published *An Essay On the Impolicy of the African Slave*

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74 My arguments in this section are indebted to Kazanjian’s analysis of colonization and “racial governmentality” in Chapter Two, 89-138.
Trade (1788). His essay charted a course for the abolition of slavery that coincided with the introduction of free trade and labor in Africa. He writes, “But suppose that the slave trade were abolished...Africans, by proper encouragement, can be brought into the habits of labour: and secondly, that free labour can be made the medium, through which the productions of their country may be collected, or brought to maturity and use” (9). In this argument Clarkson presents what he feels is a feasible economic alternative to the commercial barbarity of the slave trade. Introducing “civilization” would “change their laws” and “alter their opinions and habits” (199). The lasting effects of this transformation would also extend to Britain. Civilization would bring “beneficial effects to ourselves” (119). Invoking a consumerist image of Africans, he reflects that if “we civilize a people, we increase their wants” (119). As a result, this will “create, therefore, from this circumstance alone, another source of additional consumption of our manufactures even within the same place” (119). Africa benefits from the abolition of slavery and the development of capitalism, and Britain obtains a new market that will expand its economic base. Clarkson’s proposition took on the difficult task of convincing Parliamentary proslavery advocates to permanently abolish the slave trade, so he appealed to mercantile colonization clothed in the language of commercial viability. Although not the language of Jefferson, Clarkson’s proposition also envisions an imperial expansion of Africa by Great Britain, but this will be an empire of civilized consumption to benefit the common good.

Appeals to the common good were a staple of colonization writings and justifications for the spread of British imperialism. Philip Gould argues that capitalist ideology has long possessed a “mystique of reciprocity” based on “equilibrium through
exchange” (40). In the eighteenth century, writings on colonization offered a discursive space through which “eighteenth-century antislavery writing recuperated the ‘civilized’ quality of British and American societies (40). As Clarkson’s writing demonstrates, Africans could benefit as recipients of western civility and the termination of slavery, while those in England and the U.S. could proclaim themselves in opposition to what Gould calls “barbaric traffic” (40). This double switch justified commercial expansion, packaged in the form of liberal capitalism, as a more civilized political and economic model for Africa.

Cuffe’s commitment to civilization, his association of Africans as primitives resembling Native Americans, and belief in some of the tenets of liberalism seem to frame him as a blind supporter of capitalism, despite its pernicious effects on people of color. Gould’s brief analysis of Cuffe locates him in a tradition of early black Atlantic capitalists who promoted the commercialized expansion of Africa over the “barbaric traffic” of slavery. For Gould, Cuffe’s troubling participation in bringing so-called civilization to Africa places him in company with Wheatley, Equiano, Marrant, and Venture Smith, who “consent to dominant cultural and ideological norms” as they pursue the “entitlements and privileges” of liberalism based on “righteous labor” (151, 129). Gould finds Cuffe complicit in championing liberal individualism based on freed black labor, even as white proslavery activists in the U.S. were reconfiguring that labor as threatening the established order and in need of systematic regulation.

This image of Cuffe requires a more nuanced revision. With regard to slavery and colonization, no one had a stronger influence on his line of thinking than Clarkson (Cuffe read Clarkson’s works on slavery and made sure they were available in black-
owned shops in the U.S.). However, I see layered textures in Cuffe’s arguments for colonization that Gould oversimplifies. While Cuffe appropriated the rhetoric of civilization used by Jefferson, Clarkson, and many others, he did not do so in the same way, or with the same vision. Cuffe’s writing differs from that of Clarkson in that he was not looking to uphold British or U.S. imperial interests in Africa. Nor is he simply pursuing selfish designs for his own personal gain. In his words, he was not attempting to put forth a “Speculative Plan.” As mentioned, historians estimate that he lost nearly $8000 of investments in the process of trying to assist the Society. Moreover, he did not codify his plans for the so-called civilization of Africa as beneficial to any nation. He underwrote the Friendly Society’s mission as one that materialized in response to racialized capitalism. Those who stood to benefit most were people of color, especially ex-slaves and free blacks, who consistently encountered the structural inequality of the emerging national market economy. In essence, his colonization plan promoted a modified mirror of racial capitalism that favored black merchants while simultaneously undermining, when possible, entrenched systems of white liberal power. Instead of overthrowing the system, he sought to leverage the power of white elites that received the backing of national systems of exchange by consolidating a transatlantic network of well-connected circum-Atlantic black societies.

To clarify this point, it helps to view Cuffe’s plan for colonization as two different but related parts. When Cuffe articulated his goals of “civilization” for Africa, readers are left questioning whether he was referring to the Friendly Society in the very limited space of Freetown, or to all native Africans on the continent. The first component of his plan obviously included the local development of the Friendly Society, which he hoped to
expand by personally transporting free blacks from the U.S. In 1816, he realized that vision when he carefully identified willing free participants through organized black networks in the U.S. He outfitted and personally transported thirty-eight men and women from Massachusetts to Freetown. Those settlers became the next generation of Friendly Society members. When asked about the details, he responded, “I think of keeping open a Small intercourse between America and Sierra Leone in hopes through that Channel Some familys may find their Way to Sierra Leone” (119). The “Small intercourse” nicely captures his strategy for linking the Friendly Society and other African Benevolent Societies. He never pushed for large-scale resettlement of African-Americans. Referring to the circum-Atlantic networks that would sustain this “intercourse,” he elaborates, “I have met with, and corresponded with the People of Colour in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and it is proposed for them to form themselves into a Society for the purpose of keeping up a correspondence with this society throughout the United States and beyond the Sea” (235). The cross-cultural Society in Sierra Leone would forge trading alliances all along the circum-Atlantic and stimulate black business in these cities. Black merchants could build trade partnerships with one another based on principles that recognized black intersubjectivity. The plan called for a mutually constituted black, Christian-based, commercial egalitarianism in order to level the economic playing field in the Atlantic. Black-initiated Christian benevolence in the marketplace would challenge systematic racial inequality and opposed it with a formally organized, mutually beneficial, benevolent kindness fostered among black subjects. The growth of black business would, in theory, lead to more open and fluid networks circulating trade, people, and ideas among black communities. Other black merchants in
these cities stood to gain the most from this plan, while it is unclear whether non-business owners and other free but marginalized black laborers stood to gain much from these alliances. Nevertheless, this was a call for the recreation of social life in the face of subjection, or, positive, circum-Atlantic networks forged among disparate people alienated and disempowered by racialized capitalism.

The second part of the plan ambiguously addressed the broad idea of spreading the Friendly Society’s mission into other regions of Africa. Cuffe never formally articulated a national or even separatist vision for the Society. His writings do not indicate whether he pictured an independent colony that could formally emancipate itself from the control of Great Britain. Despite his belief that, “I See no Reason why they may not become a Nation to be Numbered among the historians nations of the World” (119), a future African nation never materializes past this general pronouncement. It remained an abstract concept, a positive vision of an undefined black nation that could theoretically embody its own egalitarian system of trade.

Cuffe’s complicated arguments for using colonization as a means of ending the slave trade brings together contradictory perspectives of native Africans and their involvement in the slave trade. This represents another difference between his plan for the “civilization” of Africa and those of Clarkson and Jefferson. Gould’s coinage of what he calls the “commercial Jeremiad” is relevant to analyzing these contradictory perspectives and placing them in a cultural and historical context. He defines the “commercial Jeremiad” as a form of antislavery writing produced in the eighteenth century that adopted “Protestant discourses about human sin, Christian morality, and divine judgment” (13). These writings argued for slavery as a “barbaric” form of
commerce that could be replaced by more benevolent, and Christian, forms of exchange. To a degree, Cuffe’s writing fits this classification. Echoing Clarkson’s sentiments, he explained:

I thought whether it would not be advantageous that an honest trade was carried on with them and instead of receiving slaves to receive the produce their country and by their industry they would be able to get such merchandize as might be serviceable among them, and thus fare be made more willing to give up the idea of the slave trade (343).

Calling for native “industry” and consumption through access to “merchandize,” he promoted a similar model of reciprocity advocated by Clarkson. Natives could abdicate their dependence on human traffic by replacing the slave trade with an “honest” trade.

In positing this juxtaposition, he sets up a dualistic representation of positive and negative commerce that resembles the commercial Jeremiad. However, this depiction does not fully fit Gould’s model. The difference is that Cuffe does not rely on a simple binary. He complicates the plan by highlighting many different forms of, to use Gould’s terms, “barbaric traffic” in the Atlantic world. His experiences in both the U.S. and in Sierra Leone lead him to expose local governors and merchants, politicians, and other racist and exploitative authorities as corrupt and malevolent. If we combine Cuffe’s critiques of white British authorities in Sierra Leone with African chiefs and corrupt American slave traders, what emerges is not a critique of capitalism. Rather, he criticizes racial capitalism and those individuals and nations that practice it. In this juxtaposition, his plan for benevolent commerce, based on the principles of spiritual intersubjectivity and managed by collective sentiment, signifies the ideal form of exchange.

Because Cuffe does not promote rugged individualism, he does not lay the blame for transatlantic slavery at the feet of individual, immoral chiefs. Nor does he portray
native Africans as immoral heathens that fail to see the injustices of slavery. As I have argued throughout this chapter, Cuffe is secondarily concerned with poor choices made by corrupt individuals who cannot extend fellow-feeling to racially different others. His primary concerns are structural racisms embedded in local and transnational markets. In Cuffe’s view, the world does not simply need more ethical individuals—it needs moral nations practicing benevolent commerce, but he is cynical of such prospects. Elaborating on this need in Africa, he explains that “in conversing with the African chiefs that it was with great reluctance they gave up the slave trade saying that it made them poor and they Could not git things as they used to git when they traded in slaves” (342). In describing one instance in which locals abdicated their participation in the slave market, he places the blame on a racially codified national practice of liberalism. U.S. slaveholders, protected by U.S. law, created a demand that sellers felt compelled to satisfy. In this image, the sellers have few marketable resources, so they reluctantly turn to the enslavement and commerce of other Africans. A series of letters emphasize that by 1815 he was paying close attention to U.S. violations of the transatlantic slave trade. Friendly Society members sent letters with details about slaving activity, and Cuffe in turn reported some of these numbers to the press (Wiggins 433-435; Thomas 108). In a letter to Samuel Aiken he writes, “for this traffick are too much carried on by the Amercan cit...It is reported that there are more than 200 Sail of

When Cuffe represents native Africans as active participants in the market, he undermines his earlier depictions of native Africans as primitive. According to some of the pro-civilization discourses outlined earlier, the indigenous African’s primitivism prohibits him or her from recognizing the need for the market. In this way, civilized westerners justify their generous offering of agriculture and industry as one that shares the benefits of a phenomenon that natives cannot understand, but from which they could benefit. However, in Cuffe’s representation, natives already engaged in the market. They did not need convincing—they needed diversification. They depended on only one form of exchange.
Vessels Cleared from Savannah for the Coast of Africa last year 1815” (435). Cuffe’s representation of lawbreaking U.S. ships, when juxtaposed against the actions of native Chiefs, portrays slavery as a nationally sanctioned endeavor that corrupts the marketplace. By extension, he places the blame of slavery on the demand for slave labor, not the greed of its sellers. He characterizes native chiefs as relatively powerless and reluctant participants in “traffick” initiated by American demand. This demand was national, not individual.76

**Conclusion: “Where is the real man of benevolence?”**

According to Kazanjian, Jefferson’s colonization plan manifested at a “crucial moment in U.S. history, a moment in which he and his fellow American elites were struggling to formulate in theory and formalize in practice the ideas of the Enlightenment” (103). His own devotion to the Enlightenment principles of rational thought and humanist reason informed his ideas for African colonization. They also informed his fantasy of subjectivity and citizenship. Jefferson and others believed in abstracted equality to the individual. He promoted liberalism as the egalitarian exchange of free white, property holding men who equally entered the market as rational traders of their own labor and resources, and sought to make the nation in this image. This plan depended on the systematic exclusion of people of African descent, and colonization discourses articulated that co-dependent relationship. Thus, the negation of black subjectivity buttressed an Enlightenment manifestation of white male individualism and

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76 For a thorough analysis of the literary addressing these issues, see Gould, especially 12-42.
in the process, reconfigured black people as unenlightened, dependent others incapable of reason and outside the purview of citizenship and subjectivity.

In creating a black cooperative trading society in Sierra Leone, Cuffe posed a challenge to Jefferson’s ideological views by reconstructing black personhood as intersubjective. From Cuffe’s perspective, the Society occupied a more refined picture of civilization because of its emphasis on mutual empowerment and communal benevolence. He critiques men like Jefferson and nations such as Great Britain and the United States for promoting a degraded form of civilization because of their devotion to racist capitalism. The Friendly Society represented an attempt to transcend the nations, traders, and market forces that systematically restricted the settlers’ economic prosperity. Its very existence offered a counterdiscourse to Jeffersonian individualism and the supposedly benevolent aims to civilize inferior people. It highlighted the entanglement of U.S. national power, racism, and liberalism. It demonstrated that individualism was just a code word for white citizenship based on the uncivilized treatment of people of color. The Friendly Society stood for a form of black, Christian, intersubjectivity that Cuffe believed was superior to the Enlightenment vision that Jefferson proposed.

Despite these positive images, Cuffe’s views on native Africans suggest that Friendly Society experienced its own contradictions. By writing indigenous people out of criterion for membership, it exposed itself to the very criticism it leveled against the western world. This presents a complicated, contradictory view of Cuffe, his writings, and the Friendly Society. He engaged with multiple and often contradictory ideological positions as he interacted with a larger matrix of people, cultures, and ideas. His vision offered both positive possibilities and problematic consequences for the diverse groups of
diasporic and indigenous Africans he encountered in the U.S. and Sierra Leone at this time.

To a degree, Cuffe’s plan never materialized beyond its initial stages. By 1816, the rise of the African Colonization Society in the U.S., backed by proslavery advocates, led much of the black community to denounce colonization and reject any future plans. Cuffe’s death in 1817 meant the Society lost its capital support and its strongest and loudest political advocate. The Friendly Society continued on, however, and attempted to build on its initial aims with moderate success. That it never achieved what it set out to accomplish may be less a reflection of its own deficiencies and more a statement on the indomitable powers it attempted to subvert.

In the epigraph I included Matthew Carey’s widely cited quotation, which pleads, “Where is the man of real benevolence, who will not join heart and hand, in opposing this barbarous, this iniquitous traffic?” (429). Based on Cuffe’s entrepreneurial pursuits, his dedication to the Friendly Society, and his tireless approach to justice for people of color, it might be tempting for some to offer him as a model of Carey’s “man.” My chapter suggests an alternative reading of Cuffe. His writings imply that he was far more concerned with collective benevolence. Cuffe’s response to Carey might have been to offer the Friendly Society as an imperfect example of intersubjective benevolence devoted to dismantling of many different kinds of “iniquitous traffic.”
In December of 1816, Mary Wainer Masters continued to grieve a series of interpersonal and cultural losses in her life. These included the recent death of her father, the family patriarch Michael Wainer, and the disappearance of her husband, John Masters, one of Cuffe’s trusted sailors who recently fled to Philadelphia without explanation. Adding to these woes, in 1813 she relocated to upstate New York, away from the interpersonal and cultural networks of which she was intimately connected. Collectively, these losses become apparent in her short letter to her uncle, Paul Cuffe, which she wrote in the fall of 1816. In the letter, Masters attends to various business concerns and reflections on her resettlement, but much of the content focuses on her sadness. She asks Cuffe to send “love to aunt Else and aunt Lidia and all enquiring friends” and adds, “I want to see you all once more. It wont be a joy to me. Westport looks very lonesome and desolate to me. I spend many hours in lonesomeness. I did not get away from it by coming away. I must conclude, from thy affectionate and loving Cousin

-Mary Wainer Masters

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77 Masters’ husband, John Masters was a former first mate for Cuffe on his trip to Sierra Leone, John Masters ran away to Philadelphia, abandoning Mary and their marriage.
get away from it by coming away.” The only thing she looks forward to in returning home is “to dig Clambs again if I live so don’t Destroy them all if you can help it.”

In the conclusion to this project, I analyze a rare document penned from the hand of a woman born into several generations of black-Native families in southeastern Massachusetts. As a Christian, woman of color born into a multi-generational black-Native family with intimate ties to the sea, Mary Wainer Masters lived at the crossroads of African and Native culture of early America. Her letter brings together the complex alliances, affiliations, and coalitions that I have analyzed in each chapter. In the pages that follow, I provide a close reading of Masters’ letter as a way to illustrate the major arguments that were central to this project. I also address issues that I briefly raised in the body of my project, especially the role of gender and intersubjectivity. Masters’ letter reflects many of the tragic corollaries of the positive social alliances that I have investigated throughout this work. It marks her loss of intersubjectivity and her desire to restore the recognition offered by those relations. In the analysis below, I examine her physical separation from kinship networks in Massachusetts, her subordinate status as a woman of color in early America, her displacement from land and cultural practices along the coast, and her physical disconnection from female-centered relational networks. On the one hand, her letter’s emphasis on multiple experiences of loneliness symbolizes many of the ways that European and Euro-American commitments to colonialism intentionally alienated black and Native subjects from kin, culture, communities, and land. On the other hand, it gestures toward the positive forms of alliance building that black and Native people fostered in response to these debilitating circumstances. Masters’ letter exposes the tensions and contradictions in historical perceptions of black
and Native peoples as dependent, subordinate, and less-than-human. The letter suggests that certain cultural lifeways that privilege interdependence could be empowering for those living precariously in the maritime borderlands of the circum-Atlantic.

In crossing cultures to form new families, communities, and cultures, people of African descent redressed alienation by creating intersubjective relationships with Native peoples in Native spaces. In doing so, they transformed notions of kinship and community. Mary Wainer Masters embodies these complex intercultural intimacies. On the matriarchal side of the family, Mary descended from several Native women who married black men. Her grandmother was Ruth Moses (also Paul Cuffe’s mother). Ruth was one of many Wampanoag, Pequot, Mohegan, and Narragansett women who found husbands in the small but growing numbers of African slaves and free blacks living in colonial New England in the eighteenth century. Similarly, her uncle Paul Cuffe married Alice Pequit, a local Native woman with possible connections to the Gay Head Christian Indian community on Martha’s Vineyard. Masters’ letter and family history suggest that she maintained close cultural bonds with both sides of her family ancestry, and that she was closely connected to the pertinent political conflicts between black and Native peoples in southern New England at this time.78 By the time of Wainer’s death, it is clear that the Wainer family to which Masters’ was connected did not live on a tribal

78 As I argued in Chapter Three, the Cuffe-Wainer families maintained close ties to the Gay Head Christian Indian community on Martha’s Vineyard. They often traveled there by boat to attend church services. It is not known whether Michael Wainer wrote as prolifically as Cuffe, but if he did, his writings have not emerged in any archive of which I am aware. The absence of this writing necessitates speculation regarding the Wainer family’s relationship to Native culture. It is not known whether Michael came from mixed ancestry, as did Cuffe. It is unclear where Wainer came from, whether he was part of a local Native tribal community, and what, if any, role he had in that community. According to Cuffe’s biographer, Lamont Thomas, Massachusetts’ marital records identify Wainer and his wife, Mary, as “mulattoes” (Thomas 122 fn6), which does little to clarify Wainer’s background. For more on the meaning of race terms in this period in New England, see Forbes 190-200.
reservation, either in Gay Head or on the mainland. They owned their own property. They likely practiced Quakerism, as did the Cuffes, and probably attended the same local meeting house that Cuffe helped build.

Between 1813 and 1816, while Paul Cuffe was busy with cross-cultural coalition building across the Atlantic, Masters was one of several members of the extended black-Native kinship network to move away from the ocean and toward mixed Native communities on the New York frontier. After Michael Wainer’s death, Masters’ brother Gardner Wainer, and Wainer’s wife, Rhoda, moved to a Quaker settlement (known as the Scipio Monthly Meeting) on Oneida lands in upstate New York. Shortly thereafter, her brothers Michael and Thomas left their respective ties to the sea and relocated to New Stockbridge, where, upon invitation from the Stockbridge Chief, they purchased land and settled permanently (Geherin). Masters’ decision to move to Oneida reflects a complicated series of decisions that involve gender, race, class, and culture. As an adult married woman of color with no living parents, who had recently been abandoned by her husband, Mary may have felt forced to follow her siblings to New York because she lacked the financial resources and opportunities necessary to remain in Westport. Another reason involves loneliness. Masters’ declaration that Westport (where the family farm was located and where she was born and raised) “looks very lonesome and desolate to me” and that she did not “get away from it by coming away” echoes the theoretical foundation from which I built my arguments for black-Native relations. The obvious point is that her “lonesomeness” involves the physical and emotional loss of her father,

79 For more on the long and complex history of New Stockbridge, the Oneida, and their relationship to the Quakers and the state of New York, see Campisi, Wyss, and Richter.
the family patriarch and the caretaker of the family farm in Westport. Wainer’s death initiated a mini-diaspora for his children and a feeling of social death for Mary. In each of my chapters I begin with what Orlando Patterson has termed a slave’s experience of “social death.” “Social death,” in the context of these writings, attends to the importance of interpersonal relations to human subjectivity and historicizes the devastation of social alienation for people of color in this era. Contextualizing Hammon’s text in Patterson’s theory allows for an alternative reading of his Narrative. Instead of capturing him, the Calusa may have rescued him in order to liberate him from slavery. Similarly, contextualizing Equiano’s Christian missionary trip on the Miskito Coast using theories on social death provides precedence for his conversion to Methodism and explains his desire for spiritual cross-cultural alliances. In the final chapter, social death allows for an understanding of how the degraded state of Freetown settlers, many of whom were former slaves in the Americas, were willing to unify under Cuffe’s leadership. It also explains the major spiritual, political, and economic components of the Friendly Society’s mission in the Atlantic world.

Masters’ intense feelings of “lonesomeness” echo the systematic forms of racial capitalism I explored in Chapter Three. Dominant discourses of the era depicted black and Native peoples as uncivilized primitives unfit for national inclusion. National rhetoric built on the supposedly free and equal exchange of labor in the marketplace, so integral to the nation’s emerging identity, codified people of color as inferior others and

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80 The father’s loss would have been a challenging financial and emotional blow to the family (according to his letters, Cuffe was devastated by the loss), but his death also seemed to split apart the family. As mentioned, after Michael Wainer died, Gardner, Rhoda, and Mary moved to Oneida, while Michael and Thomas moved to New Stockbridge. Others remained in Westport, while a few of the men continued to labor on Cuffe’s ships.
discursively restricted them from participation in citizenship and the market. Masters’ bi-racial identity symbolically brings together the ideological discourses that led to the subjection of black and Native peoples in this era. The government used its military power to expropriate Native lands and destroy Native cultures as a means of securing lands for new products and markets. The nation’s sanctioning of slavery allowed slaveholders the ability to profit from the forced removal of Native peoples from their ancestral homelands. Nineteenth century discourses on Manifest Destiny married these imperial projects together and packaged them as the foundations of American exceptionalism. At the time of writing, Masters positions herself in the midst of this emergent national project.

As a response to the destruction of Native cultures and lands, some Native communities enforced greater restrictions on national and tribal membership in order to ensure that whites could not buy property. For many Native communities and nations, this meant other people of color, including blacks, were excluded from full membership. This cultural history underscores the tensions and contradictions in cross-cultural relations depicted in black-authored texts from this period. Hammon’s complicated dealings with the Calusa, while ripe with possibility, end in conflict as he departed for Cuba, leaving the Calusa to pursue financial compensation for his loss. Equiano’s complicated relationship with the Miskito Prince George, also full of hopeful optimism, ends in disagreement and discord before the ship lands in Central America. Paul Cuffe’s problematic exclusion of local Native Africans compromises his positive coalition building in Sierra Leone. Examples of friction in these relations are not signs of disharmony, so much as they remind us that black-Native affiliations were by no means
utopian. These were connections forged in the context of death and destruction. Communities of color, under siege by competing European empires and emerging nations, had difficult choices to make about how to survive and maintain authority over their own affairs. As a result, cross-cultural relations were marked by experiences of distrust, disagreement, and conflict that one would expect in any human community, but especially those located on the brink of destruction. Masters’ loneliness gestures toward her exclusion from Native communities because she was not a full-blooded Native woman. As mentioned, her brothers, Thomas and Michael, lived nearby and bought property on the margins of the New Stockbridge Christian Indian community in a section set aside for blacks called “New Guinea” (Geherin). While they reported an invitation by the chiefs (Geherin), their property on the outskirts of the community suggests they were not fully welcome. It is likely they were not able to buy into the community because tribal laws restricted mixed race Natives from owning property. Historians have debated the reasons for this exclusion, but I side with Mandell, who argues that tribal leaders had reason to fear that land sales to non full-blooded Natives could leave the community resources vulnerable to white encroachment (56-58).

In asking her uncle Paul to pass along her “Love to aunt Else and aunt Lidia,” Masters’ feelings of “lonesomeness” reflect her distance from female networks of community. This detail complicates some of the arguments in the body of the dissertation that focus on male-male networks. In the Introduction I briefly mentioned the example of Boston King’s mother who learned herbal remedies from local Native

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81 For more on the complicated issue of race-relations in the Brothertown and New Stockbridge communities see Geherin, Wyss, Mandell, and Silverman’s Red Brethren.
82 According to Dorothy Sterling, “Aunt Else” referred to Cuffe’s wife, Alice Pequit, while “Aunt Lidia” referred to his sister, Lydia Cuffe (101).
women along the South Carolina coast.\textsuperscript{83} That King’s mother participated in female-centered networks, in which women shared knowledge, ideas, and other forms of culture with one another, echoes Masters’ desire to maintain her emotional ties with her aunts. In making the point that women who lived in coastal maritime communities developed their own matriarchal networks, Norling writes, “Shared work, then, daily brought women in and out of each other’s homes. Indeed, mariners’ wives seem to have been nearly as mobile and constantly in motion as were their seafaring men out on the vast oceans” (83). For the multiple generations of Cuffé and Wainer women living in and among their homes in Westport, life on shore must have felt like a matriarchal community where several generations of women worked together. In moving inland and away from this network, Masters discovered that life away from her experiences of maritime culture was a lonely one indeed.

To further develop this point, I have maintained throughout this dissertation that making sense of black-Native networks requires incorporating the work of Native Studies scholars. Lisa Brooks’ analysis of the “common pot” (also referred to as the “village dish”) as a metaphor for the interrelatedness of Native communities has been essential to many of the arguments in this project. The metaphor of the common pot has also been integral to recent scholarly discussion of black-Native relations (Miles “Eating Out of the Same Pot?” xvi). According to Brooks, the Brothertown-New Stockbridge leaders who relocated to live on Oneida lands use the metaphor of the common pot in their writings. They employed it as a strategic rhetorical image to build pan-tribal alliances among the

\textsuperscript{83} To remind readers, in Boston King’s \textit{Memoirs} he explains that while living in coastal South Carolina, his mother learned herbal remedies from local Native women. She used these teachings to treat slaves. He writes, “My mother was employed chiefly in attending upon those that were sick, having some knowledge of the virtue of herbs, which she learned from the Indians” (106).
tribes and nations that relocated from Connecticut to upstate New York. Brooks argues that the Brothertown movement was “rooted in the renewed ethic of reconstruction and unity” and that Occom’s strategy was to “strengthen relationships within the larger coastal network” even as he traveled the riverways northward and westward to Oneida (102). His goal, she argues, was to move the “common pot” to the Iroquois Confederacy, where the community could find better resources and land while removing themselves from colonial control (102).

Many Natives remained behind, including Occom’s sister, Lucy Tantaquidgeon. According to Brooks, Lucy “led the most effective movement to sustain the village dish” by organizing a woman-inspired effort to build a place of worship at the center of the village. The site was on sacred lands and “represented a site of communal remembrance and a central space for the maintenance of a unified community” (104). In using this example, Brooks highlights the role of women in sustaining the “common pots” that were essential to the survival of Native networks. She reminds us that if, in a literal sense, women gathered corn, mashed it with a mortar and pestle, and created a dish that nourished the community, then scholars must stay attuned to the often invisible role that Native and even black-Native women played in preserving community bonds during times of hardship and alienation. When Briton Hammon remarks that the Calusa “us'd me pretty well, and gave me boil'd Corn, which was what they often eat themselves” (22), he speaks of a literal dish that was likely prepared by female hands. This simple detail highlights the invisible role that women play in these alliances and in these texts.

A complicated picture emerges when reading Masters’ letter against Brooks’ research. On the one hand, because Masters did not live among the Gay Head or any
other local tribe in Massachusetts, it is unclear to what degree she may have felt included in women-centered, Native networks. On the other hand, Masters’ kinship ties to elder female members, some of whom identified as Native, suggest that she may have been part of an intimate network among extended female family members who did maintain close ties to Gay Head. In growing up around such women, perhaps she planted seeds, harvested corn, and mashed it into dishes that nourished the extended Cuffe-Wainer kinship network. In this way, her physical and emotional distance from these networks might explain one source of her “lonesomeness.”

In building on this point, Masters’ distance from cultural practices and tribal lands offers another possibility for her alienation. As she playfully admonishes Cuffe in her letter, she wants to visit the shore “to dig Clambs again...so don’t Destroy them all if you can help it” (Masters). The letter’s references to clam digging also highlight the multiple meanings of the common pot. This detail is yet another indication that Masters may have practiced Native culture while living on the shores of southeastern New England. “Clambs,” in this case, probably refer to Quahogs, which, for centuries, were an important source of food for Native tribes located along these shores (L. Brooks 54). However, Quahog shells were also the vital resource in the making of wampum. According to Brooks, in traditional Algonquian cultures located along the New England coastline, wampum belts were made of purple and white beads taken from quahog shells (54). Historically, for Native nations throughout the northeastern part of the continent wampum belts were vital cultural forms of exchange. As Brooks argues, they were “exchanged to create and maintain relationships” and were “instrumental to achieving social balance in the networks of relations” (54).
While Masters does not specifically mention wampum, her reference to clam digging raises several important issues regarding her feelings of “lonesomeness” that echo the larger issues I have raised in this project. As a coastal source of enrichment, the Quahog was both a literal and symbolic source of nourishment for Algonquian tribes located up and down the coast. I use it here to signify the maritime contact zones that have been so essential to this project. For Masters, contact zones in coastal Native spaces were essential for the formation and maintenance of her extended kinship network and her participation in that community. In each of the chapters I have cited maritime circuits of exchange in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were sites of contact bringing together people of black and Native ancestry. For Briton Hammon, a shipwreck off the coast of Cape Florida brought about his alliance with the Calusa. For Olaudah Equiano, the ship itself, traveling across the transatlantic, was a space of cross-cultural exchange leading to an ever more complex encounter on the shores of Central America. For Paul Cuffe, black-Native mixing in southern Massachusetts brought about his economic and spiritual philosophies, which eventually made their way to the coastal town of Freetown in Sierra Leone. These examples emphasize the active presence of Native peoples existing simultaneously at the heart, and periphery, of circum-Atlantic culture and politics. Without question, these were historically and geographically different spaces and places. One common link between these spaces is that, in my textual analyses, Native peoples appear as active agents in pursuit of communal sovereignty and the building of new cross-cultural alliances. While building these alliances, they also helped recreate social life for marginalized black subjects.
Masters’ longing for clam digging and her concern that there may not be any left indicates her possible negative feelings about the state of Native politics, issues of tribal sovereignty and land loss at this time. In Masters’ case, moving away from the ocean, and from clam digging, alienated her from specific cultural lifeways associated with coastal life and Native space. Her inability to dig clams symbolizes her dissociation from culture, land, and the networks sustained by those cultural lifeways. Maureen Konkle has argued that “Native peoples’ connection to land is not just cultural, as it is usually, and often sentimentally, understood; it is also political—about governments, boundaries, authority over people and territory” (2-3). European imperial colonial groups (and eventually, local, state, and federal governments) used military violence, administrative power, and legal authority to usurp historically Native lands, significantly weaken Native political power, and in the process, radically transform the maps of New England. In this regard, Native scholar Jean O’Brien might characterize Masters’ movement from Westport to Oneida as a process of “dispossession by degrees” in which women were “divorced from the land” (1). By evoking a term that describes the legal process through which two interconnected people are ceremonially split apart, O’Brien implies that the relationship between Algonquian tribes and their respective lands was a relational disconnection. As mentioned, this speculation assumes that Masters maintained close connections to Native lifeways, which is something we cannot know for sure. Nevertheless, she is emblematic of many Native women in this era who experienced an interrelated sense of alienation from both land and lifeways. Her longing for clam digging hauntingly symbolizes this “divorce.”
Masters’ movement away from maritime contact zones also illustrates the U.S. government’s forced removal of the five tribes of the southeastern United States to the Oklahoma territories in the antebellum era. The Indian Removal Act (1830), signed into law by President Andrew Jackson, was based on three landmark Supreme Court cases that have come to be known as the “Marshall Trilogy.” These cases legally restricted the political sovereignty of Native peoples in the territorial United States and classified their collective relationship to the federal government as one of “domestic dependent nations.” The Act initiated what became known as the “Trail of Tears.” This massive displacement of Native peoples was not without resistance, and memories of that resistance can be found in crucial black-authored texts from the antebellum period. Henry Bibb’s *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1849), and Martin Delany’s unfinished serial novel, *Black; or, the Huts of America* (1859-62), include scenes in which black protagonists engage in cross-cultural encounters with relocated members of the Five Tribes living in Arkansas/Oklahoma. Both texts celebrate historical black-Native alliances in the Southeast. However, they complicate those alliances by presenting Natives as slaveholders participating in the enslavement of black people. Delany’s text underscores the significance of intermarriage to historical black-Native coalitions in Florida discussed in Chapter One. He notes that “The squaws of the great men among the Indians in Florida were black women, and the squaws of the black men were Indian women. You see the vine that winds around and holds us together.” The work of Bibb and Delany highlights that nineteenth-century encounters between black and Native peoples deal more with frontier relations while recollecting the origins of those bonds in southeastern areas of the U.S. In this
dissertation, this “vine” that interconnects the histories of black and Native people in the Americas was planted in maritime contact zones of the eighteenth century.

While Masters’ letter underscores the racial capitalism embedded in early Republican discourses of liberty, equality, and liberalism, it also evokes the gendered forms of capitalism that systemically excluded women from economic empowerment. Her longing for clam digging indicates a frustration over gender role divisions in the Quaker community in Oneida. The conflict likely centered on Quaker restrictions on women’s labor and agriculture. O’Brien maintains that traditional gender roles in Algonquian cultures made women responsible for farming and other agricultural tasks, as well as building living spaces, collecting shellfish and taking care of domestic duties (156). In contrast, men were “warriors, diplomats, hunters, and fishermen,” but also worked side by side with women in the fields, especially in the planting of tobacco (156). This gendered division of labor had important implications for how Christian Europeans understood Native agricultural practices. According to Richter, when settlers observed that Native men did not practice agriculture, they began to justify the ideology that Native peoples as a whole were not improving the land sufficiently (612). Extending the point that Native women were “divorced from the land,” O’Brien argues, “Biblical imperatives motivated missionaries who aimed to train Indian women in English skills for structuring a household, and to integrate Indian families into the market economy” (148). Richter observes that many Christian whites, especially Quaker leaders practicing missionary work among the Iroquois at this time, believed that gendered divisions of labor according to their standards would best serve Native cultures. He argues, “When whites said they wanted to teach Indians to farm, then, what they really meant was that
they wanted to teach Indian men to become farmers, and to reduce Indian women to their proper position indoors behind a spinning wheel” (612).

The arguments of O’Brien and Richter suggest that for Masters, strict adherence to unfamiliar gender roles may have played a part in her feelings of alienation among Quakers in Oneida. There is evidence to suggest that while living in Westport she may have enjoyed more inclusive labor practices. Despite the fact that Cuffe was a devoted Quaker, it is not known exactly how the Cuffe-Wainer families observed the relationships between gender and labor. Part of this ambiguity concerns the intersection of the family’s religious practices and its participation in whaling and maritime work. Quaker beliefs may have encouraged Cuffe and other male heads of household to uphold gender divisions mentioned above. This is evident in that the Cuffe-Wainer women never went to sea with their fathers, husbands, brothers and uncles. The fact that these women remained on land while men worked at sea meant that traditional gender roles could not be applied. It is likely that Masters would have farmed, attended livestock, helped care for children, manage finances or business transactions, and performed any number of other supposedly male-oriented tasks on the property. Norling’s analysis of the lives and culture of maritime women enhance this point. She argues that nineteenth-century, patriarchal perceptions of the dependency of women on men disintegrated in maritime communities. She notes, “as whaling voyages stretched to three years and longer, the professional mariners increasingly depended on their wives and other women to sustain maritime family and community ashore” (79). Because Masters moved to Oneida, she could no longer participate in these activities.
Another layer of complexity to this analysis includes the Cuffe-Wainer family’s beliefs about female education. Cuffe built a school on his property devoted to the education of both black and Native children, and Masters probably attended the school in her youth. One of Cuffe’s letters to his schoolteacher, a woman named Sara Howard, includes a list of books that he wanted her to teach. The six texts are all antislavery publications, including the “history of Parks travels,” the “history of Clarkson’s abolishing the Slave trade,” “an Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species,” “an Essay of the Impaling of the African Slave trade,” and “Elias Hicks observations on Slavery” (402-403; Grover 75). This provocative list of antislavery literature hints that Cuffe’s views on gender may have included the education of girls and women on more than just the three R’s. Surviving letters from several women in the Cuffe-Wainer family tell the story that women not only became educated, they also pursued careers in business. Paul Cuffe’s younger sister, Freelove Slocum, owned her own store in New York City in the African community and sold goods brought back from Cuffe’s voyages. Along these lines, Masters may have enjoyed less restrictive gender roles on the coast than she did in New York. Perhaps her desire to dig clams, combined with her intense feelings of “lonesomeness,” which had not been cured by living among the Quakers, implies that Quaker divisions of labor and community did not sufficiently meet Masters’ needs. Restricted from farming and required to perform household duties, as well as sewing, weaving, and spinning, Masters may have felt that life outside of the Cuffe-Wainer networks were restrictive and suffocating.

Analysis of gender roles draws attention to some of the issues I have only briefly developed in the body of this dissertation. In Masters’ case, moving west to Oneida
might have been her only option for bettering her circumstances in the wake of her father’s death and her husband’s abandonment. Certainly she could not look eastward, toward the sea, as her brothers and uncles did when they needed money. The systematic exclusion of women from deep-sea maritime labor meant that women in Masters’ position were restricted to shoreline or port work. In the event that these opportunities were neither available nor desirable, she could look westward, which is what she did. Masters’ challenges highlight some of the inherent privileges that brought together black and Native men in circum-Atlantic spaces. In the case of men such as Hammon, Equiano, and Cuffe, their relationships to other men were supported by gender norms that essentially restricted women from working on ships. The cultural and legal restrictions on women meant that it was nearly impossible for women such as Mary to look to the sea for opportunity, money, and mobility, at least in the ways that Equiano and Cuffe found valuable.

(Re)creating Social Life in Upstate New York

In focusing on the “(Re)creation” of social life in everyday acts of interconnection, my project builds on the work of recent scholars such as Vincent Brown, Stephanie Smallwood, Saidiya Hartman, Joanna Brooks, and Franklin Knight. They have argued that Patterson’s theory falls short of explaining the creative ways that people of African descent built new cross-cultural communities in the Americas. As one

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84 As Norling details, these were arduous trials for some women, for it placed them in vulnerable financial states, dependent on income and support that was slow in arriving (79). Although the Cuffe-Wainer family did uphold certain gender norms in maritime work, it seems they adopted a more communitarian model of financial support, such that most members of the network seemed to benefit from the father’s success at sea. Masters’ class position, as a member of a financially successful family network, meant that she was not as vulnerable to the hardships of working class life to which other women were subjected.
contribution, I argue that the form and structure of eighteenth-century black-authored
texts discursively outline networks of relations as a way of preserving kinship and
cultural bonds. In addition, letter writing represented a source of relational alliance
building, particularly for those with the means to procure pen and paper and send letters
along circuits of travel. I add a new dimension to studies of cross-cultural community
building by focusing on black-Native networks. The authors mentioned above tend to
focus on cross-cultural networks among people of African descent. In contrast, I focus
on the ubiquitous cross-cultural encounters that emerge in everyday acts of cooperation
and collaboration. In many cases, these were temporary bonds intended to alleviate, or
even resist, the relationally destructive forces of European and American colonialism;
forces that, at their core, sought to separate and manage populations of color at all costs.
Their significance is that they sometimes afforded a sense of empowering personhood to
those classified as chattel or less-than-human.

Through letter writing, Masters attempted to recreate discursive bonds that could
transcend vast geographical distances between New York and Westport. In her analysis
of Algonquian literary forms, Brooks traces the origins of Native writing to birchbark
scrolls, or “awikhiganak,” that traveled along rivers and other circuits of exchange (8).
She places wampum in a Native literary tradition, arguing that “Women wove wampum
beads into strings and belts that represented the binds between nations, recorded
communal narratives and commitments, and enacted renewal and change” (9). Taken
together, birchbark writing and wampum represent a “spatialized writing tradition” that
transformed “when the European system entered Native space,” into letters, journals,
books, petitions, treaties, and other forms of writing (12). She argues, “Among Mohegans, for instance, letters were used to send news and maintain relations, particularly with family traveling outside the village” (220). Her position does not suggest that letters were necessarily different from how whites or blacks used them, but she hopes to emphasize that the tradition itself had historical precedent, and that such letters often had the larger goal of solidifying connections among larger Native networks.

From another perspective, Masters’ letter shows a resistance to “lonesomeness” that hinges on relational subjectivity. The work of Native Studies scholars Jace Weaver, Vine Deloria Jr., and Robert Warrior are essential to this perspective. Weaver argues, “A feature that cuts across various Native worldviews is the importance of community. The need for collective survival in diverse, often quite harsh, natural environments led to such an emphasis” (37). Supporting this point, Deloria argues, “Indian tribes are communities in fundamental ways that other American communities or organizations are not. Tribal communities are wholly defined by family relationships, whereas non-Indian communities are defined by residence or by agreement with a set of intellectual beliefs” (75-76). Weaver argues that in order to analyze Native texts from a Native-centered perspective, scholars must be prepared to look beyond colonial frameworks and Western theories and interpretive models. He argues that “communitism” represents a form of “hermeneutical sovereignty” for Native Studies and for Native people. Although we

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85 In this argument, Brooks aligns herself with other Native scholars, such as Maureen Konkle, who have sought to “shift the paradigm through which we view Native writing” (xxxi). Konkle and Brooks agree that views among some Native Studies and traditional literary scholars on whether “authentic” Native literature is the oral form are focused on “temporal modes of culture” that exist in the “precontact past” (xxxi). Brooks argues that Native writing traditions must be understood in the context of change and transformation, respecting that there is no such thing as “pure,” or “authentic” Native cultures. Situating long histories of Native written forms represents one way to avoid this trap.
cannot know for sure whether Masters identified as Native, we see traces of this commitment to communitism in her letter. The drive to maintain connection, to stay bonded to the networks that sustained her for so long, and the commitment to “see you all once more,” all imply a sense of subjectivity tied to community

Masters’ “lonesomeness” demonstrates her struggle to maintain intersubjectivity in the midst of dramatic alienation. Essential to this subjectivity is maintaining her connections to kin, culture, community, and land. In this way she resembles the Calusa and the Miskitu people analyzed in the body of this project. She also resembles her uncle, Paul, and many members of the Friendly Society. Consequently, I place her letter in the tradition of cross-cultural, affiliative writing analyzed in this dissertation. I began the Introduction with an anonymous quotation, written by an anonymous member of Boston’s African Society, who argued that people of African descent are “social beings.” I used this as the foundation of my work because I argue that eighteenth and early nineteenth century black and Native-authored texts demonstrate a commitment to relational subjectivity that defies certain western models of personhood. Indeed, the act of writing itself often seems designed to restore, build, or strengthen certain relations. In developing this point, I have challenged analytical models that privilege self-made individualism. One problem with these models is that certain subjects and texts do not neatly fit. Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* and Paul Cuffe logbook and letters, while committed to certain individual pursuits, cannot be fully appreciated unless they are seen as texts participating in networking and community building. These texts defy classification as championing the liberal models of individualism that have become so important to the history and development of U.S. politics and culture. Briton Hammon’s
Narrative or Mary Wainer Masters’ letter enhance this point. These texts clearly do not represent either subject as self made, self-reliant, or ruggedly individualistic. In fact, because of the objectified status of each author, these texts portray them as dependent subjects searching for community and longing for positive human interaction. This should not, however, signify the stereotypes that have harmfully characterized people of color for so long. Instead, the longing for connection and for membership in a human network should be seen as a form of positive intersubjectivity for everyone.

This has not been a project that celebrates rugged individuals, heroic, independent actors, or self-made men and women. Such studies have their place. But they are not the only stories, and they are not the only, or even the most effective ways to understand the writing of black and Native people in the early Americas. This is the story of people of color who have experienced many different forms of “lonesomeness.” They have resisted that alienation by pursuing cross-cultural connections. This has led them to rejoice at a “kind of Christian fellowship I had never seen, nor ever thought of seeing on earth” (Equiano 171). They have promoted the spiritual belief that “where there is 2 or 3 gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them” (Cuffe 8). When they have been “us’d pretty well” (Hammon 22), they have found, at least for a time, a reprieve from that solitude.
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